Introduction
Talent management continues to be a key challenge in today’s organisations, especially in the context of a multitude of megatrends which have and continue to disrupt the human resource management landscape (Collings et al., 2022; Vaiman et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, has challenged many assumptions around managing human resources and engagement with employees in organisations, which has shaped talent strategies and practices (Harney and Collings, 2021; Lazarova et al., 2023). Although there is no consensus on the definitions of talent management, the term generally refers to the identification of pivotal positions, development of talent pools of high potentials and high performers and a differentiated human resource architecture (Collings and Mellahi, 2009). In its broadest sense, it refers to organisations needing to attract, develop and retain talent to develop a sustainable talent pipeline, recognising that the meaning of talent varies in different contexts (Jooss et al., 2021a; Krishnan and Scullion, 2017). In the hospitality and tourism literature, talent management remains a relatively underexplored topic, and despite a growing number of studies in the area over the past two decades, conceptual and theoretical development remains limited (Baum, 2008; Kravariti et al., 2022). There remains a lack of clarity on the definition of talent and how talent management is effectively designed and implemented in the hospitality and tourism industry (Jooss et al., 2021b).

The hospitality and tourism industry has long been challenged by macro-level developments such as the recent pandemic (Giousmpasoglou and Marinakou, 2021). However, the spread of COVID-19, global quarantines and countries’ partial or total lockdowns have had an unprecedented impact on the industry’s businesses (Baum et al., 2020) and many organisations were forced to bankruptcy (Gössling et al., 2021). These macro- and meso-level effects also significantly impacted the employment market in the hospitality and tourism industry. Specifically, in 2019, the industry contributed over 10% to the global employment (ILO, 2020) while this figure shrank to half in 2020, with more than 60% of workers, mainly from the lodging and food and beverage sectors, losing their jobs (ILO, 2022). Simultaneously, the majority of hospitality and tourism businesses suspended recruitment plans while many of those workers who continued to be employed faced insecure employment due to the uncertain and volatile business environment in the industry (Baum et al., 2020; Gursoy and Chi, 2020).

In response to these business and employment challenges, some organisations such as Marriott International and Pret a Manger introduced furlough strategies for parts of their existing workforce to avoid permanent redundancies (Huffman et al., 2022). In addition, some governments initiated employee retention programmes to protect jobs in the industry, for example, compensation schemes designed by the Greek and Italian Governments (ILO, 2022). However, despite these efforts, the pandemic has brought to the fore the precarious nature of work arrangements in the industry. Ultimately, this has led to many employees...
losing their jobs and exiting the hospitality and tourism industry, with only some being willing to return, highlighting that this approach to managing staff is not a sustainable practice when developing talent pipelines for the industry (Jooss et al., 2021a).

The pandemic raised a set of questions around the future of work in the industry, provided opportunities for organisations to reframe their employee experience around issues of well-being, work–life balance and more flexible working arrangements, and highlighted the need to better prepare for future crises and more sustainable management of the workforce (Birtch et al., 2021). Notably, a major concern relates to how the industry’s organisations will attract talent to fill pivotal positions and job vacancies more broadly, in the post-pandemic era (ILO, 2020). Organisations are required to revamp their talent management efforts to provide (potential) employees with stability and career opportunities (Birtch et al., 2021). As organisations slowly recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, they need to re-calibrate their talent management strategies and practices with emerging strategic trajectories and market changes to enhance organisational performance, agility and resilience (Kravariti, 2023). Although some insights and lessons have emerged about managing human resources during the recent pandemic (see e.g. Collings et al., 2021; Vaiman et al., 2021), there is limited contextualised evidence on managing talent in the hospitality and tourism industry. Given the central role of people in delivering the industry’s core offerings, in which service experiences are intangible and involve personal interactions between customers and employees (Baum et al., 2020), it is important to understand the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on talent management at both organisational and individual levels.

**The papers in this special issue**

This special issue on *Talent Management in the New Normal of Hospitality and Tourism* consists of six articles which offer insights into the lessons and opportunities for talent management in hospitality and tourism amid COVID-19. It also contributes to key debates and highlights future research directions in the post-pandemic era. A brief summary of each article’s contribution to the special issue follows below:

In “Beyond competing for talent: an integrative framework for coopetition in talent management in SMEs”, Jooss et al. (2023) unpack how small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can operationalise coopetition in talent management. In their conceptual paper, they draw on coopetition literature and take an interorganisational talent pool lens, identifying potential for coopetition when attracting, developing and retaining talent. The identification of talent pools which are externally focused and shared among a number of co-opting firms emerges as an alternative to traditional talent pools, moving the talent debate beyond the “war for talent” competition agenda which dominates the literature. The study highlights how coopetition talent strategies can help industries faced with acute talent shortages to establish market-thickening pipelines – a key challenge as organisations struggle to rehire staff post COVID-19 back to the hospitality and tourism industry. Taking an open-systems perspective, the study develops an integrated framework for coopetition which will be valuable to researchers developing empirical work in the area, and identifies a set of prerequisites, catalysts and potential inhibitors which must be effectively managed.

In the second article, “Are people the greatest asset: talent management in SME hotels in Nigeria during the COVID-19 crisis”, Howe-Walsh et al. (2023) empirically assess talent management approaches in the underexplored context of Nigeria. Drawing on the resource-based view, the study suggests that before COVID-19, senior hotel leaders almost exclusively operated a colonial model of management and invested in expatriate talents as they were considered to possess the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities, whereas the
potential of local talent was often overlooked. The study, however, highlights the emergence of a more proactive and sustainable approach in the new normal of hospitality and tourism, supported by the development of networks among expatriate and local talents which enhanced knowledge transfer and created a more balanced and resilient talent pool.

In “Strategic talent management in hotels during COVID-19: upper echelons and dynamic attention-based perspectives”, Garavan et al. (2023) explore the role of senior hospitality managers in strategic talent management during the pandemic. The empirical study draws on interview data with participants located in Germany, India, Ireland, Singapore and the UK. Using both upper echelon theory and the dynamic attention-based view, the study highlights that, in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, some general and senior managers engage both with the design and the enactment of strategic talent management. The study shows that managers who follow a promotion-oriented approach to decision-making were expected to enact new or amended talent practices, responding to the new normal. The study provides evidence of three strategic approaches to managing talent management, i.e. finance-/bottom-line-centric, operation-centric and people welfare-centric. It also highlights the important role that the institutional context plays in driving the orientation towards talent management by both general and senior managers, the key hospitality and tourism stakeholders who were primarily responsible for responding to the new conditions imposed by a crisis and for recalibrating the firm’s resources to achieve greater levels of organisational agility and performance.

The fourth article by Magrizos et al. (2023) “Talent orchestration and boomerang talent: seasonally employed chefs’ evaluation of talent management practices” examines the under-researched context of smaller and individually owned restaurants in Greece. This article contributes to the discussion on the retention of hospitality and tourism talent. A key objective of the study was to explore how seasonal workers assess their organisations’ talent management practices, and in particular, how these practices impacted on seasonal chefs’ intention to return to the same organisation as “boomerang talent”. Building on the resource orchestration perspective, the study developed a talent orchestration model consisting of three orientations: structuring (i.e. clarify meaning of talent and recognise talent), bundling (i.e. provide autonomy to talents to build their teams and show meritocracy) and leveraging (i.e. create an environment of mutual respect which supports employees and provides opportunities for creativity). The model highlighted the drivers and inhibitors which may impact talents’ intention to return to their previous employer – a key factor shaping rehiring efforts during the recovery phase post COVID-19.

The fifth article by Sigala et al. (2023) “Talent management in hospitality during the COVID-19 pandemic in Macao: a contingency approach” draws on contingency theory to examine the adaptation of talent management practices within the Macao hospitality and tourism industry – a consequence of operational challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. By analysing data collected over various time periods during the pandemic, the study reveals how firms have adopted a contingency lens around workforce planning, training and development, and talent deployment and replacement. A key finding of the study highlighted an increased focus on soft skills when recruiting talent, the introduction of temporary rotation and a significant reduction of the expatriate workforce, flagging the need for agility to align talent management practices to market changes in periods of turmoil. The study concludes with a framework depicting talent management approaches before, during and after COVID-19, setting the context for potentially a new normal of managing talent in Macao.

The final article in the special issue by Manoharan et al. (2023) “Industry talent branding: a collaborative and strategic approach to reducing hospitality’s talent challenge” examines
the concept of industry talent branding, considering a strategic yet realistic impression of the employee value proposition in the industry. Combining signalling and brand equity theories, the authors propose a conceptual framework for industry talent branding. This framework may be used by key stakeholders to efficiently communicate to talents the industry’s employee value proposition, resulting in various micro-, meso- and macro-level outcomes. The study concludes that the post-pandemic era is viewed as an opportunity for the industry’s organisations to address the employee experience and to focus more on achieving greater diversity and inclusion supported by developing non-traditional talent attraction practices.

Concluding remarks

This special issue set out to explore talent management in the new normal of hospitality and tourism organisations. The six articles in this special issue examined key lessons for talent management from the COVID-19 pandemic experience and mapped out several post-pandemic issues and future research directions for the hospitality and tourism industry. We conclude that the industry’s recovery and sustainable growth will depend in large measure on its response to the acute staff shortages faced and the development of a talent agenda which includes the provision of decent work and more competitive compensation, alongside a move from precarious work towards more stable contractual arrangements (Baum et al., 2020; Jooss et al., 2021a). This is a key requirement to address the growing inequalities in the global labour market and to provide more sustainable careers for workers in the hospitality and tourism industry. We suggest that new innovative talent strategies and practices are required to address staff shortages which draw on non-traditional and more diverse talent pools (e.g. greater use of boomerang hiring and tapping into the talent pool of older and retired workers who are underused in the industry). Predicting talent needs and identifying skills gaps will be a key challenge in the hospitality and tourism industry and we suggest greater use could be made of talent analytics to better inform human capital decision-making in the industry (Collings et al., 2021).

The special issue suggests that the future of talent management in the hospitality and tourism industry needs to embrace trends related to the future of work and that one key lesson learnt from the pandemic experience was the recognition of the need to adapt to continuous change and learning which suggests workforce reskilling as a priority area for the future. Organisations will need to be more agile to respond to market changes and changing customer demands which will require firms to deploy talent more flexibly, but also to pay more attention to developing and supporting employees’ careers, an area of traditional weakness in the industry. For the existing workforce, a stronger focus on training, learning and development will be important to equip workers with the new skills required for the future of work in the hospitality and tourism industry.

In addition, we highlight the need to pay more attention to the key role of a wide range of stakeholders in the industry which involves managing competing priorities and aligning multiple perspectives. We suggest that talent metrics should be extended to include multiple stakeholders and that talent metrics should include a set of employee health and well-being measures. Hospitality and tourism organisations increasingly need to understand and show greater sensitivity to the needs and aspirations of their existing workforce to create a greater sense of identity and attachment, and to achieve the higher levels of engagement needed to deliver the ever-increasing levels of customer experience required in the industry. We also note the need for stronger senior and line management support for a talent culture, experienced by employees on a day-to-day basis.
We hope that the contributions in this special issue will stimulate further research in the area and contribute to a greater understanding and development of talent management as a core strategy within hospitality and tourism businesses. We would like to thank all the authors included in this special issue and like to express our sincere appreciation to the various reviewers who provided constructive and timely feedback. This special issue is dedicated to the memory of Mr Dimitrios Kravaritis. We hope you will enjoy reading this special issue.

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