



# Managerial strategies to reduce stress and brain drain in tourism through moral values

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**Purpose:** This research explores effective managerial practices to reduce brain drain in tourism by promoting moral values such as compassion and empathy. It investigates how a supportive work environment can decrease employee stress, improve job satisfaction and retain skilled professionals.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study employed a structural equation modelling-partial least squares (SEM-PLS) longitudinal model over three periods in 2023–2024. Invitations were sent to 47 inland hotels, with only 6 participating. It aimed to provide tools for employees to cope with pandemic-related crises. Managers distributed the questionnaires, yielding 267 responses out of 290.

**Findings/results:** The research highlights how managerial practices focussed on moral values such as compassion and empathy can reduce brain drain in tourism by alleviating employee stress. It shows that values-driven training programmes foster a supportive work environment, leading to greater job satisfaction and talent retention. Limitations call for further longitudinal studies.

**Practical implications:** A key limitation was the lack of longitudinal studies on training's impact on values within the same population. Additionally, focus groups were needed because of employees' unavailability for scheduled meetings.

**Originality/value:** It was observed that the training helps not only overcome stressful situations but also provided a sense of commitment and excellence towards the company, helping to connect workers and customers. Similarly, it contributed to reducing the level of stress by improving its customer-facing training, which helped to overcome unforeseen changes in the hotel.

**Keywords:** managerial practices; stress; overtourism; hotels; values; destinations; developing areas.

## Introduction

Tourism plays an essential role in Spain (Moreno-Luna et al., 2021; Robina Ramírez et al., 2021a). According to the World Tourism Organization, Spain has the second highest number of international tourist arrivals. This substantial economic dependence on tourism, which represents 14.1% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (UNWTO, 2023), has led to policies and practices that encourage high visitor numbers.

This leads to potential overtourism issues in many areas, particularly in cities such as Barcelona, Madrid and the coastal regions (Chamizo-Nieto et al., 2023; García-Hernández & De Miguel, 2021). As a result, it creates immense pressure on local services, leading to increased workloads for those in the tourism industry (Smeral, 2019). Employees often find themselves dealing with larger crowds (Namberger et al., 2021), more frequent customer interactions (Martínez Suárez et al., 2021; Robina-Ramírez et al., 2023) and higher expectations (Berselli et al., 2022), all of which contribute to heightened stress levels (Walmsley et al., 2022) provoked by exceeding personal and organisational capacities. This not only challenges the work conditions, but it also makes them vulnerable to brain drain with a growing number of employees seeking work in other sectors with comparatively better working conditions (Gössling et al., 2020; Robina-Ramírez et al., 2022). Heightened stress levels often stemming from factors such as high workloads, demanding customer interactions and insufficient resources, take a significant toll on employees. This sustained stress can lead to burnout, decreased job satisfaction and deteriorating mental and physical health (Maslach & Leiter, 2022).

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Persistent stress causes employees to feel less engaged and committed to their organisation (Karatepe et al., 2018). This not only modifies the social and work environment (Migliore et al., 2021) but also leads to increasing mental health problems in workers (McCartney et al., 2022).

These problems have been seen among workers not only in developed tourist destinations, but in developing as well (Krisnadi & Maharani, 2021; Sutanto & Setiadi, 2020). When faced with high-stress work environments in both developed and developing countries, employees may start exploring career options in other sectors that offer better work-life balance, less demanding schedules and more supportive work cultures.

Even though studies have addressed mitigating brain drain in relation to various countries and economic sectors (Baruch et al., 2007; Tung & Lazarova, 2006), our research has identified a gap. There appears to be no existing research specifically analysing the brain drain from tourism sector to other sectors whether they are referring to developing or developed countries. This gap highlights the need for focussed investigation into how and why skilled professionals are leaving tourist sector for opportunities in different fields. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing targeted strategies to retain talent within the tourism sector and to ensure its sustainable growth.

Analysing organisational stress as the main cause of brain drain to refrain from a particular tourist destination, has been well researched in academia (Randall et al., 2005; Robina-Ramírez et al., 2021a; Semmer, 2003). However, to date, there is hardly any empirical evidence that addresses stress reduction that goes beyond modifying working and organisational conditions. This introduces the second contribution of the article: addressing not only organisational issues but also personal values.

When organisations emphasise values, it creates a more positive and supportive work environment which helps to reduce the stress (Srivastava, 2011). It operates by fostering a sense of purpose and belonging among employees. When personal values are prioritised, employees feel more aligned with the organisation's mission, leading to greater job satisfaction (Robina-Ramírez & Pulido Fernández, 2018). This alignment reduces workplace stress as it promotes open communication, mutual trust and a supportive culture where employees feel valued and understood.

Additionally, a values-driven environment encourages managers to lead with empathy and fairness, which helps to prevent conflicts and reduce pressure on employees (Biswas, 2024). By promoting a culture of support and recognition, employees are more likely to experience lower levels of stress, as they feel secure in their roles and confident in the organisation's commitment to their well-being. According to Ruiz-Fernández (2021), stress can be reduced through dealing with three values, namely, compassion, tolerance and empathy.

Based on the foregoing, this study aims to analyse the state of stress of workers from six hotels located in the southeast of Spain called the 'Extremadura region', where the tourism sector is the primary economic driver of the region. According to the 'Guide to Managing Stress in Crisis Response Professions,' several training sessions focused on improving the organisational atmosphere, as well as the personal perceptions of workers within the company (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). The measurement of the perception of the workers was carried out at three different moments at the end of the training period.

## Theoretical framework

### Stress at work in the tourism sector

Work stress is the psychological reaction of workers to certain stimuli (Yan & Donaldson, 2022). These stimuli can come both from the work environment as well as from adverse external conditions, such as the situation caused by coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) (Robina-Ramírez et al., 2021b). Stress is the most recurrent mental health problem among workers in the tourism sector (Luu, 2022). This phenomenon is mostly because of factors inherent to working in the sector that generate dissatisfaction in the work environment such as the temporary nature of the sector, overly demanding clients and supervisors, inefficient training, long and rotating shifts, or the performance of certain functions (Stamolampros et al., 2019).

In the tourism sector, pressure is visualised in: (1) hiring, retention or dismissal of personnel, caused by the indeterminate characteristics (seasonality, precarious employment, early retirement or dismissal because of financial losses) (Wong et al., 2021); (2) constant modifications or cancellations of reservations because of both COVID-19 quarantines and restrictions by government authorities (Moreno-Luna et al., 2021).

Tourism is a contact sector where most services are provided with a high level of interaction between customers and employees (Robina-Ramírez et al., 2021c). The fundamental philosophy of the sector is that 'the client is always right', which causes an unequal relationship between the worker and the client to please them (Bani-Melhem & Quratulain, 2020). Employees are often treated poorly by customers, because of the high expectations placed on the service (Stamolampros et al., 2019). This complacent role of the worker without adequate training and compensation from the organisation contributes to a gradual worsening of the well-being environment at work, causing stress and dissatisfaction (Al-Hawari et al., 2020; Robina-Ramírez et al., 2021b).

Such an attitude of the worker can be transferred to the customer attitude, because it has been shown that customer satisfaction is associated with worker satisfaction (Bakar, 2020; Siswanto & Yuliana, 2022). These work situations require an adequate response at worker levels. Employees in

the tourism sector are responsible for providing high quality service, according to the level of job satisfaction perceived and the values they develop at the tourism hotel.

### Development values at the organisation at the tourism sector

The tourism sector provides multiple opportunities to foster an organisational culture based on experience, encounters, moral challenges and pressures to overcome. These require the development of skills and values in professionals in the sector (Bakar, 2020). Such values are concepts or beliefs that function as guiding principles in people's lives (Rokeach, 1973) to improve self-esteem when it is threatened by a crisis situation (Schnall & Roper, 2012).

Several studies have shown that internal aspects at work, worker values and the stress at work (SW) are all connected (Feather & Rauter, 2004; Robina-Ramírez et al., 2020; Robina-Ramírez & Pulido-Fernández, 2019; Yan & Donaldson, 2022). According to Sánchez-Hernández et al. (2020), promoting values is a key tool to adequately address difficulties and reduce the stress they may cause. Among those, compassion, tolerance or empathy help to create a climate of well-being for the worker, contributing to a reduction of the level of stress, both inside and outside the workplace (Bakar, 2020; Lim & DeSteno, 2016; Robina Ramírez et al., 2021b; Schnitker, 2012; Tucker, 2016).

Compassion is a positive self-attitude and emotion regulation strategy (Luo et al., 2019). As the capacity to alleviate the negative emotions experienced by individuals, it helps to understand and respond to stressful situations (Neff, 2003). It is a feeling generated by the concern about the suffering of others. It motivates the desire to reduce stress (Asensio et al., 2017). In the workplace, compassion triggers feelings of affection, care and tenderness towards others, without the expectation of obtaining specific organisational benefits (Eldor, 2018). It is particularly beneficial in service-oriented workplaces, such as the tourism sector because it allows solidarity with people in unforeseen situations that cause them disorder (Eldor, 2018). This is because compassion brings in relief in times of stress, contributing to improved job performance and reduced stress (Aboul-Ela, 2017).

We understand tolerance as patience towards others' opinions or practices, avoiding everything that they would consider offensive, in order to coexist (Schwartz, 2023). Being tolerant implies developing the ability to accept the values and beliefs of others (Von Bergen & Collier, 2013). It provides an environment of comfort and well-being in the workplace even in unexpected and unforeseen situations. This openness improves job performance (Luo et al., 2019).

According to Davis (2006), empathy is the ability to put oneself in another's place through the manifestation of affective and non-affective responses. Empathy tries to understand the internal state of another person

(Clark et al., 2019). When we put ourselves in the place of the other, positive emotions are generated to better understand the situation that the person is experiencing which allows them to improve their job performance. Empathy favours a pro-social disposition towards people, reducing stressful situations created (Eisenberg, 2000).

The development of these values – compassion, tolerance and empathy – is essential to avoid a decrease in work performance and the occurrence of psychosomatic complaints, depression and other effects of long-term stress, because of this high level of interaction (Enzmann et al., 1998). The acquisition of values in the work environment provides the worker with a sense of calm and tranquillity, allowing them to improve their attention to the public as well as enhancing their leadership capacity (Robina-Ramírez et al., 2021d; Schnitker, 2012). It favours communication between colleagues, strengthens teamwork (Gupta et al., 2014) and encourages the exercise of compassion, tolerance and empathy (Schnitker, 2012; Siu, 2003; Tucker, 2016).

### Hypothesis and model

Following the review of the relevant literature on the constructs underpinning the conceptual model of this study (see Figure 1), the following research hypotheses are formulated, based on the insights gained.

- H<sub>1</sub>: The development of values (year 1) (ES1) influences the development of values (year 2) (ES2)
- H<sub>2</sub>: The development of values (1st year) (ES1) influences reducing stress at work (1st year) (SW1)
- H<sub>3</sub>: Reducing stress at work (year 1) (SW1) influences reducing stress at work (year 2) (SW2)
- H<sub>4</sub>: The development of values (year 1) (ES1) influences the development of values (year 2) (ES2)
- H<sub>5</sub>: Reducing stress at work (year 2) (SW2) influences reducing stress at work (year 3) (SW3)
- H<sub>6</sub>: The development of values (2nd year) (ES2) influences reducing stress at work (2nd year) (SW2)
- H<sub>7</sub>: The development of values (3rd year) (ES3) influences reducing stress at work (3rd year) (SW3)

The next section provides a detailed explanation of how the literature informs these hypotheses and justifies the subsequent quantitative analysis presented in this article.

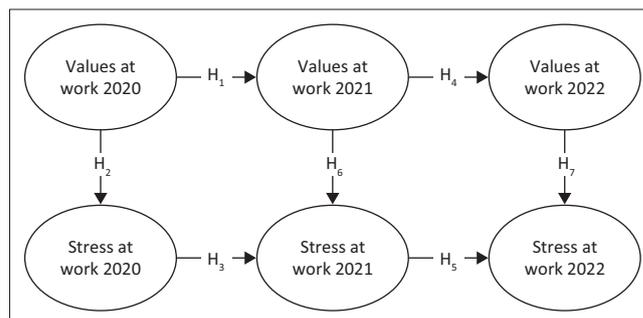


FIGURE 1: Model.

## Methodology

### A longitudinal study

Different disciplines have addressed the partial least squares (PLS) in the last decade (Hair et al., 2012). However, the number of papers that have presented longitudinal models is still relatively small (Hair et al., 2014). Some studies however, can be mentioned in the field of human resources and tourism, such as: Liang et al. (2021) and Saridakis et al. (2017).

Longitudinal models start from a prediction of the evolution of the constructs (Shea & Howell, 2000) more appropriate for small sample sizes (Henseler et al., 2009; Jacobs et al., 2011). The model presented is based on the analysis of structural equation modelling-partial least squares (SEM-PLS) longitudinal model. It is applied to three periods of time: June–July 2023, January–February 2024 and June–July 2024.

Initially, an invitation letter was sent to all the different four-star and five-star hotels located at the inland areas. According to Robina-Ramírez et al. (2021d), from the 272 hotels in the study region, there are 47 four- and five-star hotels. In April 2023, letters of invitation were sent to all 47 four- and five-star hotels, but only 6 hotels – Hotel Ilunion Mérida Palace, Gran Hotel D. Manuel Cáceres, Isan Trujillo, Zurbarán Hotel, Badajoz Parador de Plasencia and Badajoz Centre Hotel – showed interest in being involved in the study. Table 1 provides details of the hotel departments and the staff of these six participant hotels.

In the communication sent to the hotels, we explained the content of the study based on providing tools to workers to overcome situations of psychological, emotional and social crises, and the uncertainty of the sector (Yu et al., 2021). Each hotel manager internally sent the questionnaire to the employees. From a sample of 290 questionnaires, the starting sample was 267 responses.

### The training sessions

According to the US Department of Health and Human Services (2005), two topics need to be addressed: (1) to reduce

**TABLE 1:** Hotels, departments and staff.

Departments	Hotel ilunion mérida palace	Gran hotel D. Manuel cáceres	Isan trujillo	Zurbarán hotel badajoz	Parador de plasencia	Badajoz centre hotel
Direction	2	3	2	3	3	3
Reception	7	6	5	5	6	7
Bookings	3	3	2	3	3	2
Floors	10	12	9	9	10	9
Food and drink	6	7	6	7	6	5
Maintenance	2	2	1	2	2	1
Animation	0	1	1	2	2	1
Security	1	1	1	2	2	1
Commercial	3	3	1	2	4	3
Management	3	3	2	4	4	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>37</b>

the stress in the organisational atmosphere (OA) and (2) to improve the personal perception among workers (PP). During June 2023, 26 workers and 9 hotel managers in the tourism sector were involved in two focus groups to develop these two topics, according to their daily activities at the hotels (Sánchez-Oro Sánchez & Robina-Ramírez, 2020). In the first section, four attributes of the OA were established: the quality of management-employee communication channels to transfer negative experiences (OA1), as well as incorporating and modifying flexible hours to overcome certain difficulties experienced by the staff (OA2), to share experiences of stress and skills among workers to overcome them (OA3), and to develop skills in stressful situations, develop strategies for a better assignment of the workload (OA4). In the second section, other four aspects of the PP of company workers were considered: to avoid negative thoughts towards the other because it is easy to focus on the negative view such as highlighting successes and positive results (PP2), to bring meaning and satisfaction to routine work, develop measures to protect the health and safety of employees (PP3), and to highlight the useful training received in the company to incorporate it into the company (PP4).

To reduce the three causes of stress, namely, mental anguish (MA), job performance distress (JPD) and social perception anxieties (SPA) (Yu et al., 2021), six online training sessions to strengthen the values 'compassion', 'tolerance' and 'empathy' were conducted for the workers and hotel managers (Table 2). The structure of the sessions was as follows. First session: (1) introduction (15 min); (2) theoretical session, concept of

**TABLE 2:** Stress and values to reduce stress.

Values	Reduce the stress	Type of stress
<b>Compassion</b>		
It is a feeling generated by concern about the suffering of others (Asensio-Martínez et al., 2017).	OA3	MA
Compassion, contributing to improved job performance and reduced stress (Aboul-Ela, 2017).	OA4	JPD
Triggers feelings of affection, care and tenderness towards others (Barsade and O'Neill, 2014; Dutton et al., 2006; Eldor, 2018).	PP1, OA1, PP2, PP3	SPA
<b>Tolerance</b>		
Being patiently open to others' opinions or practices (Navas et al., 2022).	PP1, PP4	MA
It provides an environment of well-being in the workplace to improve the job performance (Cao & Zhang, 2020).	PP2, PP3	JPD
Developing the ability to accept the values and beliefs of others (Von Bergen and Collier, 2013).	OA3	SPA
<b>Empathy</b>		
Ability to put oneself in another's place through the manifestation of affective and non-affective responses (Davis 2006).	PP1	MA
Better understand the situation that the person is experiencing which allows them to improve their job performance (Bustamante et al., 2021).	PP3	JPD
Empathy favours the pro-social disposition towards people reducing the stressful situations created (Eisenberg, 2000).	PP2, PP4	SPA

Note: Please see full reference list of this article: <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajbm.v55i1.4842> for more information.

OA, organisational atmosphere; PP, personal perception among workers; MA, mental anguish; JPD, job performance distress; SPA, social perception anxieties.

values (30 min); (3) practical session, application of values to the different departments of the hotel (30 min); and (4) questions and closure of the session (15 min). Second session: (1) presentation of a case (15 min); (2) participatory discussion (30 min); (3) drawing conclusions (30 min); and (4) closure of the session (15 min). The average participation was 92% of the available staff.

### Definition of variables and indicators

To analyse the impact of the three values on reducing stress in workers in three periods of times, two focus groups were organised to define two variables among the hotel managers: 'developing values at work (VW)' and 'stress at work (SW)'. Although hotel managers participated in the research, it was applied only to workers because they were more affected by uncertainty and SW according to the previous focus groups organised.

After several debates, both the workers and hotel managers understood the development of 'worker values' as the search for the meaning that every task in the hotel contains that is above any remuneration or material benefit. Such values allow workers to observe and discover the positive effect of work both on themselves and on other workers, clients and hotel managers.

'Stress at work' was defined as the lack of balance between workloads and the worker's responsiveness. This response capacity can be formed according to the development of values in the worker. In the second session, a series of attributes were provided, converted into indicators, extracted from the literature (see Table 3).

Each of the three values, namely, compassion, tolerance and empathy (Bakar, 2020; Robina-Ramírez et al., 2021a; Schnitker, 2012) were aligned with the indicators of the study with the aim of reducing stressful situations (see Table 4).

### Ethical considerations

Ethical approval to conduct this study was obtained from the University of Extremadura Faculty of Business, Finance, and Tourism Ethics Committee (No. 21/2024.).

**TABLE 3:** Indicators.

Indicators	Authors
<b>Values at work (VW)</b>	
VW1 It brings strength of will to overcome any obstacle	Creel and Tillman, 2008.
VW2 Improves organisational culture by providing a sense of commitment and excellence	Bakar, 2020; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003.
VW3 Help connect with workers and customers	Bakar, 2020; Kochukalam and Srampickal, 2018; Lim and DeSteno, 2016; Robina-Ramírez et al. 2021a; Schnitker, 2012; Tucker, 2016.
<b>Stress at work (SW)</b>	
SW1 Improve training and confidence in dealing with the customer	Bani-Melhem and Quratulain, 2020; Robina-Ramírez et al. 2021a.
SW2 Unforeseen changes in the hotel such as cancellations of reservations	Bonfanti et al., 2021; Moreno-Luna et al., 2021.
SW3 Compliance with safety and hygiene protocols	Bonfanti et al., 2021; Kim and Han, 2022.
SW4 Uncertainty of the tourism sector	Filimonau et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2021.

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## Results

### Measurement model

To test the measurement model between the indicators and the latent variables, we used SmartPLS 3.3.7 PLS optimisation software. According to Hair et al. (2012), the objective of this method is based on minimising the variance between each of the variables and indicators of the measurement model. Based on Carmines (1979), we first studied the individualised reliability from the factor loadings between each of the indicators and their respective latent variables. At a value equal to or greater than 0.7, this criterion was met (see Table 5).

We analysed the reliability and validity of the model through simple reliability based on Cronbach's alpha (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), Rho\_A (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015) and

**TABLE 4:** Relations between values and stressful situations.

Criteria	VW1	VW2	VW3	SW1	SW2	SW3	SW4
Compassion	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tolerance	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
Empathy	-	X	X	-	X	-	X
Respect	X	X	X	-	X	-	X

SW, stress at work; VW, values at work.

**TABLE 5:** Loadings.

Variables	VW-01.21	VW-01.22	VW-06.21	SW-01.21	SW-01.22	SW-06.21
SW1-01.21	0.891	-	-	-	-	-
SW1-01.22	-	0.897	-	-	-	-
SW1-06.21	-	-	0.833	-	-	-
SW2-01.21	0.823	-	-	-	-	-
SW2-01.22	-	0.816	-	-	-	-
SW2-06.21	-	-	0.789	-	-	-
SW3-01.21	0.836	-	-	-	-	-
SW3-01.22	-	0.898	-	-	-	-
SW3-06.21	-	-	0.785	-	-	-
SW1-01.21	-	-	-	0.769	-	-
SW1-01.22	-	-	-	-	0.894	-
SW1-06.21	-	-	-	-	-	0.894
SW2-01.21	-	-	-	0.802	-	-
SW2-01.22	-	-	-	-	0.864	-
SW2-06.21	-	-	-	-	-	0.766
SW3-01.21	-	-	-	0.823	-	-
SW3-01.22	-	-	-	-	0.836	-
SW3-06.21	-	-	-	-	-	0.884
SW4-01.21	-	-	-	0.796	-	-

VW, values at work; SW, stress at work.

**TABLE 6:** Reliability and validity of the model.

Variables	AC	rho_A	CR	(AVE)	VW 20	VW 21	VW 22	SW 20	SW 21	SW 22
<b>Parameters</b>										
SW-01.21	0.809	0.816	0.887	0.724	-	-	-	-	-	-
SW-01.22	0.842	0.857	0.904	0.759	-	-	-	-	-	-
SW-06.21	0.725	0.727	0.844	0.644	-	-	-	-	-	-
SW-01.21	0.810	0.812	0.875	0.636	-	-	-	-	-	-
SW-01.22	0.832	0.841	0.899	0.748	-	-	-	-	-	-
SW-06.21	0.805	0.817	0.886	0.722	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Fornell and Larker criterion</b>										
VW 20	-	-	-	-	0.851	-	-	-	-	-
VW 21	-	-	-	-	0.463	0.871	-	-	-	-
VW 22	-	-	-	-	0.548	0.630	0.802	-	-	-
SW 20	-	-	-	-	0.593	0.507	0.588	0.798	-	-
SW 21	-	-	-	-	0.538	0.678	0.641	0.613	0.865	-
SW 22	-	-	-	-	0.679	0.682	0.620	0.589	0.682	0.850

SW, stress at work; CR, composite reliability; AVE, average variance extract; VW, values at work.

composite reliability (Werts et al., 1974) where the values obtained were greater than 0.7. However, to analyse the validity of the model, we turned to the average variance extract (AVE) parameter. In this case, it was enough that the values obtained were greater than 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Following the criteria of Fornell and Larcker, for the conditions to be accepted, the values extracted in the upper vertical line must be greater than the horizontal and vertical values located below. The criterion was also accepted (see Table 6).

The values obtained from the Fornell and Larcker criterion needed a better fit. For this, we used the 'Heterotrait-Monotrait' (HTMT) criterion whose values must be less than 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2009). The values as shown in Table 7 were accepted.

## Structural analysis model

The relationship between the constructs was studied in the structural analysis model. Through the bootstrapping technique, four parameters were obtained: the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) and path coefficients ( $\beta$ ), the student's  $t$ -distribution and the  $p$ -value indicators (Chin, 1998) (Table 8).

To adjust and reduce the standard errors to a minimum, the model generated 5000 subsamples with the aim of obtaining the following parameter known as the standardised mean square residual (SRMR) (Henseler et al., 2009). For values less than 0.8, the adjustment was considered acceptable; this was 0.074; therefore, the model was considered adjusted (Hu & Bentler, 1998). The explanatory and predictive capacity was obtained from the determination coefficient  $R^2$  and the predictive relevance  $Q^2$ . In the first case, it was understood that the explanatory capacity was strong for values greater than 0.67, moderate if the values were between 0.67 and 0.33, and weak between 0.33 and 0.19. Four of the five constructs showed moderate explanatory power, as shown in Table 8. According to Stone-Geisser ( $Q^2$ ) (Geisser, 1974; Stone, 1974), predictive relevance can be accepted for  $Q^2 > 0$ , which was true (see Table 9).

**TABLE 7:** Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT).

Variables	VW 20	VW 21	VW 22	SW 20	SW 21	SW 22
VW-01.21	-	-	-	-	-	-
VW-01.22	0.559	-	-	-	-	-
VW-06.21	0.706	0.794	-	-	-	-
SW-01.21	0.731	0.605	0.761	-	-	-
SW-01.22	0.647	0.798	0.814	0.740	-	-
SW-06.21	0.842	0.817	0.791	0.728	0.824	-

VW, values at work; SW, stress at work.

**TABLE 8:** Path coefficients.

Path coefficients	$\beta$	Confidence interval (%)		Statistic $t$ ( $ O/STDEV $ )	$p$
		2.5%	97.5%		
H1: VW-01.21 $\rightarrow$ VW-06.21	0.548	0.468	0.641	11.997	0.000***
H2: VW-01.21 $\rightarrow$ SW-01.21	0.593	0.501	0.681	12.657	0.000***
H3: SW-01.21 $\rightarrow$ SW-06.21	0.343	0.226	0.650	6.315	0.000***
H4: VW-06.21 $\rightarrow$ VW-01.22	0.630	0.565	0.708	17.323	0.000***
H5: SW-06.21 $\rightarrow$ SW-01.22	0.410	0.268	0.535	5.785	0.000***
H7: VW-01.22 $\rightarrow$ SW-01.22	0.399	0.267	0.556	5.273	0.000***
H6: VW-06.21 $\rightarrow$ SW-06.21	0.418	0.299	0.552	7.123	0.000***

VW, values at work; SW, stress at work; STDEV, standard deviation.

\*, denotes a significance level of  $0.01 < p < 0.05$ , indicating a significant result; \*\*, denotes a significance level of  $0.001 < p < 0.01$ , showing a moderately significant result; \*\*\*, denotes a significance level of  $p < 0.001$ , indicating a highly significant result.

**TABLE 9:** Predictive and explanatory capacity.

	$R^2$	$Q^2$
VW-01.21	-	-
VW-01.22	0.397	0.296
VW-06.21	0.300	0.182
SW-01.21	0.351	0.219
SW-01.22	0.550	0.397
SW-06.21	0.462	0.324

VW, values at work; SW, stress at work.

## Discussion

After more than 2 years with time limitations, travel restrictions or new safety and hygiene protocols to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and to control possible spikes (Moreno-Luna et al., 2021; UN, 2020; UNWTO, 2020; WHO, 2022), an increase in stress has been detected that contributed to psychological and mental health issues among workers (McCartney et al., 2022). Although it is true that to date the effects of the transmission of severe acute respiratory

**TABLE 10:** Structural model results. Path significance using percentile bootstrap 95% confidence interval ( $n = 5000$  subsamples).

H	Results	Influence	SPC	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics  O/STDEV	$p$	Change of sign
H1	Accepted ***	H1: VW-01-21 → VW-06-21	0.548	0.554	0.468	11.997	0.000	No
H2	Accepted ***	H2: VW-01-21 → SW-01-21	0.593	0.598	0.501	12.657	0.000	No
H3	Accepted ***	H3: SW-01-21 → SW-06-21	0.343	0.345	0.226	6.315	0.000	No
H4	Accepted ***	H4: SDW-06-21 → VW-01-22	0.630	0.634	0.565	17.323	0.000	No
H5	Accepted ***	H5: SW-06-21 → SW-01-22	0.410	0.405	0.268	5.785	0.000	No
H6	Accepted ***	H6: VW-01-22 → SW-01-22	0.399	0.407	0.267	5.273	0.000	No
H7	Accepted ***	H7: VW-06-21 → SW-06-21	0.418	0.419	0.299	7.123	0.000	No

VW, values at work; SW, stress at work; SPC, Statistical Process Control.

\*, denotes a significance level of  $0.01 < p < 0.05$ , indicating a significant result; \*\*, denotes a significance level of  $0.001, < p < 0.01$ , showing a moderately significant result; \*\*\*, denotes a significance level of  $p < 0.001$ , indicating a highly significant result.

syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) have been mitigated, favoured by vaccination coverage above 92% in the population over 12 years of age in Spain and by the application of measures not pharmacological control, as stated in Royal Decree 286/2022, of April 19. This study, however, validates a tool that contributes to reducing the stress produced by the anomalous situation in which the hotel industry is still immersed. Validation occurs by fulfilling the seven hypotheses with the highest degree of significance. Specifically, the hypotheses H4: VW – 06.21 → VW – 01.22;  $\beta = 0.630$ ,  $t = 17.323$ , H2: VW – 01.21 → SW – 01.21;  $\beta = 0.593$ ,  $t = 12.657$  and H1: VW – 01.21 → VW – 06.21,  $\beta = 0.548$ ,  $t = 11.997$ . It was observed that the transmission of the values of compassion, tolerance, and empathy (Lim & De Steno, 2016; Schnitker, 2012; Siu, 2003 Tucker, 2016) has contributed to providing a meaning of the work carried out beyond its materiality (Cook, 2011). It has also contributed to reducing stress among workers in the tourism sector (Luu, 2022).

In the interviews carried out with the workers of the six participant hotels, causes that were repeated on different occasions can be seen, such as: the temporary nature and insecurity of the contracts (interviews 1, 2, 5, 13, 14); the disproportionate demand of some clients, especially regarding the hygienic conditions of the room (interviews 4, 8, 10, 13, 15); the lack of education of the immediate supervisor in dealing with workers (interviews 1, 5, 6, 9, 12); maintaining the same pressure on workers translated into the same responsibility when the restrictions have been reduced (interviews 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 15). To measure the application of the model, the sign change analysis method was used. To ensure the validity of the model, the non-parametric values and their level of significance were analysed ( $*p < 0.05$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ;  $*p < 0.001$ ). This model adjustment was preceded by the study of the algebraic sign change between the hypotheses (Hair et al., 2012). To do this, the parameters of the  $t$ -student (4.999, 1.64) performed in one-tailed tests were used. The relationships between the hypotheses were positive and validated at 99.9% of their confidence interval (CI) ( $p < 0.000$ ) with high significance ( $p = 0.000$ ) (Table 10).

To analyse whether the training provided had an effect among the hotel workers, we analysed the effect of the change of sign. As shown in Table 10, the variations between VW-01-21 → VW-06-21 and VW-06-21 → VW-01-22 were significant, which

means that the workers were deepening not only the knowledge of the four values explored but were able to apply it in their daily routine in uncertain situations (interviews 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 14). Similarly, there was also no sign variance between SW-01-21 → SW-06-21 and SW-06-21 → SW-01-22, which expressed a positive evolution in the reduction of stress among workers. Although in the first data collection we did not appreciate a direct influence between the training received and stress reduction, it was perceived between the second and third data collection VW-06-21 → SW-06-21 and VW-01-22 → SW-01-22. This may have been because of the time all learning takes to implement behavioural changes.

With the advancement of training in values, workers understood that the growth in the meaning of compassion was a relief in times of stress, which contributed to the improvement of work performance and the reduction of stress (Aboul-Ela, 2017) (interviews 1, 3, 4, 14, 15). In the same way, many employees considered it important to be respected by their colleagues because it had repercussions on a work environment of satisfaction and free of pressure (interviews 1, 7, 10, 12, 15). The workers gave special consideration to the acceptance, by the boss, of those results that were not particularly satisfactory and that could be improved. Workers valued a tolerant attitude from superiors as it helped to relax the work environment (interviews 3, 8, 9, 10, 15) (Luo et al., 2019). The most valued value was empathy. The workers requested that the bosses know how to put themselves in the place of the worker to understand their professional and personal circumstances, and from there help them to be more productive (interviews 1, 2, 4, 9, 15).

## Conclusions

In the ever-evolving tourism industry, destinations in both developed and developing areas face the pressing issue of brain drain, where talented professionals leave their positions for better opportunities elsewhere. This not only affects the operational efficiency of businesses but also poses a long-term threat to the sustainability of the tourism sector. A critical approach to mitigating this issue involves managerial practices that focus on reducing employee stress – a key factor contributing to brain drain. By integrating moral values into these practices, organisations can create a supportive work environment that fosters employee retention and satisfaction.

The study introduced a training and participatory programme uniting managers and employees to focus on reducing stress and enhancing personal perceptions. The OA was improved through better communication channels, flexible work hours, stress-sharing and workload management. For PP, the programme emphasised avoiding negativity, highlighting successes, finding meaning in routine tasks, and utilising company training effectively. To address stress causes – MA, JPD, and SPA – six online sessions focussed on strengthening compassion, tolerance and empathy among workers and managers, aiming to foster a healthier, more supportive work environment.

The *first* conclusion drawn from this research underscores the significant role that values play in mitigating stress levels among tourism sector workers. The industry is inherently high-pressure, with employees often facing demanding situations that test their resilience and adaptability.

This study introduced a training and participatory programme that brought together managers and workers to focus on promoting elements directly linked to the workers' values, such as empathy, compassion and integrity. The findings indicate that by aligning organisational practices with these core values, it is possible to create a work environment that significantly reduces stress. Employees who feel that their personal values are recognised and respected by their employer are more likely to experience job satisfaction, remain committed to their roles and perform effectively under pressure.

For destinations struggling with brain drain, particularly in high-stress tourism environments, this approach offers a viable solution. By investing in the personal development of employees through value-driven initiatives, organisations not only enhance the well-being of their workforce but also build a loyal and stable team. This, in turn, reduces the likelihood of employees seeking opportunities elsewhere, thus directly addressing the issue of brain drain.

To combat brain drain in high-stress tourism settings, the study suggests implementing value-driven management strategies. By integrating moral principles such as empathy, compassion and integrity into daily operations, businesses can create supportive work environments that reduce employee stress – a key factor in brain drain. Training programmes focussed on these values not only boost job satisfaction but also improve employee retention, making it less likely that talented workers will leave. Moreover, the study highlights the cumulative benefits of continuous value-based training, which strengthens over time and helps employees better handle industry pressures. This approach fosters a positive workplace culture, leading to higher morale and productivity, which can attract and retain talent, directly addressing the challenges of brain drain.

The *second* conclusion of this study is grounded in the longitudinal analysis of the effects of value-based training on

stress reduction. Over time, the research observed a consistent positive impact of this training on both the development of values among workers and the reduction of stress levels. As the training progressed, the relationship between these variables became increasingly strong, indicating that the model used in the study was becoming more robust and effective.

This finding has significant implications for the tourism sector, especially in the context of brain drain. It suggests that the benefits of value-based training are not only immediate but also cumulative, leading to long-term improvements in employee well-being. As the explanatory capacity of the model grew, it became clear that continued investment in such training could produce increasingly positive outcomes. To resolve brain drain in high-stress tourism environments, implementing targeted programmes and strategic plans is essential. Begin by introducing value-based training programmes that emphasise empathy, compassion and integrity, which can significantly reduce employee stress and improve job satisfaction. Regular workshops and participatory sessions should be organised to reinforce these values, helping employees feel more connected to the organisation.

Develop flexible work arrangements and robust support systems that address employees' individual needs, making it easier for them to manage stress. Establish clear communication channels between management and staff, allowing for the open discussion of challenges and the sharing of solutions.

Create career development plans that include continuous learning opportunities and pathways for growth within the organisation. This not only improves skill sets but also motivates employees to stay. Additionally, promote a positive workplace culture where teamwork and collaboration are encouraged, and achievements are celebrated. By investing in these programmes and plans, organisations can build a resilient, loyal workforce, reducing the likelihood of employees leaving for better opportunities elsewhere.

For managers in the tourism industry, this provides a compelling argument for the implementation of similar training programmes. By systematically incorporating value-based training into their operations, organisations can create a more resilient workforce capable of handling the stresses inherent in the industry. This resilience reduces turnover rates and enhances employee retention, making it a strategic tool in the fight against brain drain. Furthermore, the replicability of the model across different tourism destinations suggests that this approach could be adopted widely, offering a standardised solution to a common challenge. For managers in the tourism sector, the findings present a persuasive case for adopting similar training initiatives. The study emphasises that integrating moral values into the core of employee development can significantly enhance the work environment, making it more conducive to employee well-being and retention. These programmes focus on fostering empathy, compassion and integrity among staff, which not only helps in reducing stress but also strengthens the bond between employees and the organisation.

By implementing these value-driven strategies, managers can create a more resilient workforce, capable of handling the unique challenges of the tourism industry. Employees who feel supported and aligned with the organisation's values are more likely to stay committed to their roles, thereby reducing turnover rates – a common issue in high-stress environments.

Furthermore, the cumulative impact of continuous value-based training, as highlighted in the study, suggests that the benefits are not just immediate but also long-lasting. Over time, employees develop a stronger connection to their work and the organisation, leading to improved job satisfaction and performance. This, in turn, creates a positive feedback loop where a supportive work environment leads to higher employee morale, which then enhances service quality and customer satisfaction.

Adopting these practices can also serve as a strategic tool to attract new talent, as potential employees are likely to be drawn to organisations that prioritise their well-being and professional growth. In essence, these training programmes offer a sustainable solution to the ongoing challenge of brain drain in the tourism industry.

The *third* conclusion revolves around the robustness of the value-based model, particularly in uncertain and adverse conditions. The study found that the model's explanatory and predictive capacities were strong, suggesting that it could be effectively applied across the tourism sector, even in challenging environments.

Tourism is an industry often affected by external factors such as economic fluctuations, political instability and natural disasters. These adverse conditions can amplify the stress experienced by workers, making it even more critical to have a supportive managerial framework in place. The value-based training model, as demonstrated in this study, provides such a framework. By equipping employees with the moral tools to navigate stress and uncertainty, organisations can maintain operational stability and protect their workforce from the detrimental effects of these external pressures.

This conclusion is particularly relevant for destinations that are more vulnerable to economic or social instability. For these locations, implementing a value-based training model can serve as a buffer against the negative impacts of such conditions, ensuring that employees remain engaged and committed even in the face of adversity. By fostering a work environment where personal values are prioritised, tourism businesses can not only reduce stress but also strengthen employee loyalty, thereby reducing the risk of brain drain.

The *fourth* conclusion highlights how value-based practices contribute to the creation of a more positive and relaxed work environment. In the context of stress, workers who have embraced values such as compassion, tolerance and empathy are better equipped to handle challenges and collaborate effectively with their peers. This shift in workplace culture has led to an environment where failures are seen not

as opportunities for blame, but as chances for collective learning and improvement. This positive work environment is crucial in the tourism sector, where employee interactions directly influence customer experiences. A workforce that feels supported and valued is more likely to deliver high quality service, leading to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty. This, in turn, has a reinforcing effect on employee morale, creating a virtuous cycle of well-being and productivity.

For destinations facing brain drain, this approach offers a powerful tool for employee retention. When workers feel that their emotional and moral needs are being met, they are less likely to seek employment elsewhere. Moreover, the improved work environment can attract new talent, further mitigating the effects of brain drain. This conclusion emphasises the importance of creating a culture of continuous improvement, where both personal and professional development are encouraged and supported.

While the study provides strong evidence in support of value-based managerial practices, it also acknowledges certain limitations. One of the primary challenges encountered was the lack of longitudinal studies that measure the long-term evolution of value-based training's impact on the same population. Additionally, organising focus groups posed logistical difficulties because of the limited availability of employees to attend scheduled meetings.

These limitations point to the need for further research to build on the findings of this study. Future studies could explore the long-term effects of value-based training across different demographics and cultural contexts within the tourism sector. By addressing these gaps, researchers can develop an even more comprehensive understanding of how moral values influence employee stress and retention.

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