

## CHALLENGES IN MANAGING PERIPHERAL WORKERS WITHIN DIVERSE ENVIRONMENTS

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This article explores the HR issues that tour operators experience in the planning, coordination, and management of tours revolving around cycling events. It does so by using a tour operator based in the UK as a case study and by deploying a qualitative ethnographic approach. This methodology was deemed as the most fitting to enable an in-depth and rich analysis of the issues that characterize the complex management of core (office-based employees) and peripheral workers (tour guides on the event site). Not only do the different operations, time frames, environments, and activities within which the employees operate result in the company's workforce division into two distinctive groups, but they also determine low levels of professional satisfaction and motivation among the tour guides. Investigating the stances held by the company's employees in relation to the difficulties encountered in the workplace is necessary to develop a strategy that allows for retaining peripheral workers, for creating synergy between the two different teams, and consequently for ensuring the achievement of the organization's goals and objectives. The findings highlight how the adoption of HR practices that aim at enhancing the company's internal marketing would entail an optimistic shift in the tour guides' perception of their position within the company, resulting in improved product delivery and reduced absenteeism, burnout, and turnover challenges.

**Key words:** Human resources; Peripheral workers; Tour guides; Internal marketing; Tourism; Events

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### Introduction

This study looks at the difficulties encountered by a UK-based cycling tour operator (STA) in retaining peripheral workers and managing two teams of employees operating across different environments and with different work conditions. Such challenges, which characterize the professional landscape of

tour guides (tour guides are seasonal event workers), are common to international case studies of tourism and event companies and their practices in managing noncontingent employees (Ababneh, 2017; Ap & Wong, 2001; Cohen, 1985; Gavino, Martinez, & Malos, 2010; Guerrier & Adib, 2003; Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013; Mak, Wong, & Chang, 2011; Melubo & Buzinde, 2016; Min, 2014).

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1 Given that the literature regarding the manage-  
2 ment of peripheral workers within diverse envi-  
3 ronments is limited to studies on tour guides in  
4 developing countries, on the employees of hotel  
5 chains in rich countries, or on strategies to retain  
6 festival volunteers, the study sets to understand  
7 the challenges entailed in small businesses operat-  
8 ing in the human resource (HR)-dependent service  
9 industries, to provide a more efficient personnel  
10 approach. By presenting the analysis and evalua-  
11 tion of the existing issues among small tour/event  
12 operators from a human resource perspective, the  
13 study proposes internal marketing strategies as a  
14 means to enhance the company's human resource  
15 management (Beech & Chadwick, 2006; Costen,  
16 Johanson, and Poisson, 2010; Evans, Campbell, &  
17 Stonehouse, 2003; Hughes & Rog, 2008; Kotler,  
18 Bowen, & Makens, 2014; Kuslivan, Kuslivan,  
19 Illhan, & Buyuruk, 2010; Van De Vorde, Van De  
20 Voorde, & Veld, 2016), to minimize staff turnover  
21 and facilitate the management of the workforce  
22 across the two different work environments.

### Theoretical Background

#### *Tour Guides: Challenges and Issues*

28 Tour guides are often referred to as the front-line  
29 staff of tour operators and event organizers (Cohen,  
30 1985; Guerrier & Adib, 2003; Mak et al., 2011;  
31 Melubo & Buzinde, 2016). In fact, the empha-  
32 sis that service-based industries put on the direct  
33 interaction with the customers and the role that  
34 tour guides play in the cocreation of tourist product  
35 suggest that tour guides become part of the travel  
36 and event product itself (Guerrier & Adib, 2003;  
37 Kuslivan et al., 2010). More specifically, many  
38 authors point out that tour guides directly influence  
39 the customers' experience, because they function as  
40 "the company's spokes-persons" (Mak et al., 2011;  
41 Melubo & Buzinde, 2016), "pathfinders" (Cohen,  
42 1985; Mak et al., 2011; Melubo & Buzinde, 2016),  
43 "brokers" (Guerrier & Adib, 2003), and "anima-  
44 tors" (Mak et al., 2011).

45 However, despite their pivotal role in the tourism  
46 and events industries (Ap & Wong 2001; Melubo  
47 & Buzinde, 2016), tour guides, just like many other  
48 event- and tourism-related job roles, are usually  
49 perceived as occupants of a low status position due

to the poor social welfare conditions and insuffi-  
cient financial recognition that their career entails  
(Ap & Wong, 2001; Mak et al., 2011; Mckenzie &  
Kerr, 2013; Melubo & Buzinde, 2016; Min, 2014).  
Although this broad depiction may suffice to justify  
the tour guides' low professional satisfaction, it is  
important to mention other factors that contribute to  
the disadvantageous employment condition of this  
category of workers. Previous studies on the sub-  
ject reveal that the classification of tour guides as  
contingent workers of the tourism industry, which  
employs them as independent contractors and sea-  
sonal workers, constitutes one of the main triggers  
for occupational stress (Ap & Wong, 2001; Hwang,  
Lee, Park, Chang, & Kim, 2014; Mak et al., 2011;  
Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013; Melubo & Buzinde,  
2016; Min, 2014). In fact, tour guiding contracts  
usually present functional, numerical, spatial, and  
pay flexibility based on the event characteristics.  
Such an approach, although it can prove to be a  
beneficial solution for the challenges that managers  
of tourism and hospitality businesses face through-  
out the different seasons (Guerrier & Lockwood,  
1989), also entails a pessimistic view of the work  
environment from the employees' perspectives.

More precisely, the negative emotional conse-  
quences of being a peripheral worker are usually  
due to the perceived job insecurity and unpredict-  
ability which, together with the detachment from  
the operational core of the company, foster a sense  
of being disadvantaged in comparison to noncon-  
tingent workers (Ababneh, 2017; Gavino et al.,  
2010; Kalleberg, 2000; Mak et al., 2011; Min,  
2014). In addition to this, the unconventionality of  
the employment relationship, which usually results  
in limited direct interactions with managers and  
coworkers, determines a lack of perceived organi-  
zational support (Kalleberg, 2000; MacKenzie &  
Kerr, 2013; Min, 2014).

Furthermore, if service-oriented jobs are renowned  
for entailing unsociable hours and intensive physi-  
cal and emotional labor (Boella, 2013; Dimitriadis,  
2017; Kotler et al., 2014; Kuslivan et al., 2010;  
Nickson, 2013), the frontline position that tour  
guides occupy within tour operators determines  
an even more intense workload, whose extent and  
overwhelming power often remain obscure to the  
managers and office-based workers (Bharwani  
& Jauhari, 2013; MacKanzie & Kerr, 2013; Min,

2014). Several studies show that this lack of understanding of the physical challenges and emotional pressure, to which tour guides are exposed while on the event site, is often the main reason why tour guides feel unappreciated in the work environment and unsatisfied with their professional career (Ababneh, 2017; Guerrier & Adib, 2003; Kotler et al., 2014; Melubo & Buzinde, 2016; Min, 2014).

Hence, it becomes evident that the most common challenges and issues that affect tour guiding jobs are linked to the inadequate HR practices implemented by the operations manager on behalf of the event/tourism company (Ababneh, 2017; Ap & Wong, 2001; Cohen, 1985; Gavino et al., 2010; Guerrier & Adib, 2003; Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013; Mak et al., 2011; Melubo & Buzinde, 2016; Min, 2014). In fact, it is found that in the operations manager's perspective the management of financial and material assets is often prioritized, determining inadequate interactions with the human resources of the company (Costen et al., 2010; Gavino et al., 2010; Kotler et al., 2014; Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013; Min, 2014).

#### *Through the Human Resource Lens*

HR practices have undergone increasing sophistication throughout the past few decades across every business sector, as personnel management has developed from being perceived as one of the components of an organization to being treated as an essential and distinctive managerial department (Boella, 2013; Nickson, 2013).

More specifically, the high turnover rate, which characterizes the tourism, hospitality, and event businesses, where human resources tend to be simultaneously the most significant cost and valuable assets (Akgunduz & Bardakoglu, 2017; Boella, 2013; Costen et al., 2010; Evans et al., 2003; Hughes & Rog, 2008; Kotler et al., 2014), has prompted academics and practitioners to reflect upon the need for more efficient HR practices, as to reduce the costs associated to the leaving, replacement, and training of employees (Beech & Chadwick, 2006; Boella, 2013; Tag-Edleen & El-Said, 2011). In addition to these tangible expenses, events and tourism businesses often fail to recognize the indirect costs related to the inadequate management of human capital within the organization: the decline in service quality and consistence (Boella, 2013).

In order to tackle such issues and reduce the related expenditures, HR experts suggest the adoption of a successful talent management strategy (Boella, 2013; Guerrier & Adib, 2003; Hughes & Rog, 2008; Kusluvan et al., 2010; Mak et al., 2011; Melubo & Buzinde, 2016), especially in human-driven businesses within the service-based industries. In fact, from a business-like point of view, human resource management aims at the effective exploitation of the human talent, which is of core relevance in the service sectors, where service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty (Kusluvan et al., 2010), as well as product and program development, mostly depend on the employees' performances (Baum, 2008; Beech & Chadwick, 2006). Therefore, in this context especially, human resource management plays an important role in supporting the organization's competitive strategy, as the implementation of more efficient practices is believed to facilitate the achievement of the organization's goals and objective (Ababneh, 2017; Baum, 2008; Beech & Chadwick, 2006; Evans et al., 2003; Hughes & Rog, 2008; Kusluvan et al., 2010; Prayag & Hosany, 2015).

Implementing good HR practices becomes more complex in companies such as tour operators, where it is often physically unfeasible to systematically interact with the employees, supervise their performances, understand, and evaluate their work conditions and the consequences that these have on the employees' quality of life (Nickson, 2013). However, given the central role of personnel in service industries and the limited studies on unconventional employment relationships, the deployment of the HR lens is necessary to investigate those issues that underlie the poor performances of event and tourism companies; and to analyses and discuss the challenges faced by the organizations in the complex management of core and peripheral workers.

#### *Case Study Context*

The STA case study is a UK-based cycling travel agency, which attracts customers from all over the world and has been operating event trips across Europe since 2008. The company delivers lifetime experiences targeted to an emerging niche consumer of sport event tourism: road cyclists.

1 The STA's success revolves around the high-  
2 quality event and tourism products delivered to its  
3 customers: from the booking to the inbound flight  
4 every detail is taken care of, both by the office team  
5 and by the knowledgeable tour guides on field. The  
6 STA team aims at conveying the idea of cycling  
7 prosupport, providing the customers with suitable  
8 nutrition, transfers, mechanic support, feed sta-  
9 tions, vehicle back up, and masseurs throughout the  
10 sportive event. By designing and producing such  
11 complex events and travel packages, the STA has  
12 been able to combine a traditional, relaxing holiday  
13 atmosphere with a professional support, which aims  
14 at fulfilling the costumers' main interest for attend-  
15 ing the STA trips: having an authentic cycling event  
16 experience.

17 The complex production of cycling travel and  
18 event products entails careful planning, coordina-  
19 tion, and management of the tours both from office-  
20 based employees and from a team of tour guides on  
21 the road. The synergy between these two teams has  
22 proved to be complicated, due to the different opera-  
23 tions, time frames, environments, and activities that  
24 bound the STA workforce in two distinctive groups.  
25 Both the teams are managed by the Operations Man-  
26 ager who, being based in the office, gains a thor-  
27 ough insight of the office employees' performances,  
28 but has a limited understanding of the tour guides'  
29 labor while delivering the cycling experience at the  
30 event. As a consequence, the office team benefits  
31 from a close relationship with their manager, who  
32 has the chance to monitor the employees' activi-  
33 ties, to appraise their conduct when suitable, and to  
34 evenly distribute the workload. However, simulta-  
35 neously, the tour guides often feel disregarded and  
36 misunderstood by the Manager, and consequently  
37 by the organization, due to their being detached  
38 from the rest of the team who doesn't witness the  
39 implications of the trip/event delivery. At this stage,  
40 it is important to specify that the on the road staff  
41 is composed of employees with different contracts,  
42 and different experiences within the STA.

43 The above-mentioned issues, together with the  
44 precariousness of being a freelancer, the inade-  
45 quate and delayed payments, the lack of training,  
46 which would be crucial in order to handle critical  
47 situations that may occur during the delivery, and  
48 a more general discontent with the working condi-  
49 tions, have caused high turnover rates among the

tour guides, especially during high season, when  
the workload is at its fullest. As a consequence,  
the reputational image of the STA has been dam-  
aged, the recruitment of new tour guides has been  
inaccurate and solely aimed to quickly fill in the  
vacant positions, and the returning customers have  
lamented the absence of those tour guides with  
whom they had previously cocreated an emotional  
bond on the basis of the sportsmanship and memo-  
ries shared at the events.

Therefore, it is important to explore the issues  
faced by the STA case study and the challenges  
entailed in tour guide management in order to gain a  
deeper understanding of the underlying factors that  
result in staff attrition and turnover; a phenomenon  
that presents itself far too often within the events  
and tourism industries.

Research with regards to the management of  
peripheral workers in event and tourism organiza-  
tions is scarce, mainly focused on studies related to  
tour guides' conditions in developing countries, and  
even then, it is usually limited to the investigation  
of the problem rather than the exploration of ade-  
quate strategies to be adopted (Ababneh, 2017; Ap  
& Wong, 2001; Cohen, 1985; Gavino et al., 2010;  
Guerrier & Adib, 2003; Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013;  
Mak et al., 2011; Melubo & Buzinde, 2016; Min,  
2014). Therefore, this study aims to understand  
and tackle the HR issues of the STA understudy to  
facilitate the management of the workforce across  
its two different work environments. This will be  
achieved through the following objectives:

- to explore the significance of human resource practices in the management of peripheral workers in the events and tourism industry;
- to forward recommendations for the adoption of more efficient human resource practices.

### Methodology

As the phenomenon understudy is constructed  
and revised mostly according to people's experi-  
ences, the methodology adopted is of qualitative  
nature (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2013;  
Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Gratton &  
Jones, 2004). Moreover, it is worth mentioning that  
at the time of the data collection, the researcher was  
directly involved in the day-to-day operations of

the STA. This enabled the author to actively engage with the research participants, and to provide an emphatic analysis of the meanings and actions that result from the dynamics that influence the research problem (Creswell, 2013; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009; Silverman, 2016; Veal, 2011).

A case study design has been deemed as the most fitting because of its potential in achieving a vivid and in-depth analysis of the overall phenomenon and its subunits, and in conveying both uniqueness and completeness to the problem investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Stake, 1998; Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2009). Furthermore, in light of the internal knowledge of the company and of the researcher's familiarity and role within the reality under study, the deployment of semistructured interviews and participant observation make of this research project an ethnographic study characterized by direct access to the data (Crang & Cook, 2007; Gray, 2014; Holloway, Brown, & Shipway, 2010; Saunders et al., 2009; Silverman, 2016; Veal, 2011).

Selected through a purposive sampling strategy (Bryman, 2015; Saunders et al., 2009; Veal, 2011), the research participants were observed over a 9-month span (March–September 2016), and mainly interviewed in September (due to the difficulty in reaching them when on the road). This enabled to monitor and detect the development of their experiences and perceptions in relation to their professional life throughout the different times of the working season. The participants were mainly part of the on-the-road team (tour leaders, tour guides, mechanics, masseurs); however, some of the office-based employees participated in the research, allowing for a more thorough understanding of the problem by comparing and contrasting the differing stances that characterize the two workforces.

All the participating interviewees were asked for approval to be involved in the study, were guaranteed anonymity, and made overtly aware of the role of the researcher as a participant observer. After devising questions based on the gaps identified through a study of the existing knowledge on HR practices for the management of peripheral workers in event and tourism companies, a total number of 15 semistructured interviews were conducted (ranging from 20 to 50 min). The notes taken were integrated with those of the observation sessions, which focused on the dynamics and interactions

manifesting in the day-to-day activities of the business, in the team meetings, and in the virtual communications with the peripheral workers when abroad. Qualitative answers and notes underwent thematic analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Silverman, 2016), which allows for the identification of key concepts emerged by the corroboration of visual and verbal data. Threats to the production of trustworthy data were counterbalanced by scheduling a time for debriefing, as to ensure consensus construction with the participants (Saunders et al., 2009). Also, in order to produce an authentic and unbiased report, a personal journal was deployed during the observation period as to adopt a self-reflexive stance (Crang & Cook, 2007).

## Findings and Discussion

The research findings are hereby presented according to the aim that guided the research project: understanding and tackling the HR issues faced by the STA, so to facilitate the management of the workforce across the events and, consequently, determine the company's success.

A total of 15 employees have been interviewed throughout the research process, resulting in a total of 15 interviews. Although participant observation was particularly focused on the 12 research participants, it also extended to the overall investigation of the STA as a company, which comprises a total of 20–32 employees (depending on the season), both core and peripheral workers.

### *The Voices of the Peripheral Workers on Event Trips: Challenges and Implications*

The findings of this research show that a variety of factors ranging from job insecurity to limited interactions with the core workers underlie the occupational and emotional stress and consequent low professional motivation and satisfaction experienced by the research participants. This is clearly expressed in the following citations.

It's a beautiful job, but at some point, you need to face reality. No fixed income, no guarantees, no social life. My girlfriend split up with me in July because I managed to see her only twice in 4 months. One day she calls me, and she says she

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could never make family-oriented plans with me. As tour guides we end up being alone most of the time, with no real place to come home to. (Participant 4, 64–68)

And

I don't even hear from the Managers once we come back home after the event. It's not like they follow up or something. At some point, they will phone up expecting me to get on a plane on the following day. . . . And they know we will say yes. There are bills to pay. (Participant 9, 26–31)

Such findings are in alignment with the main issues identified in international case studies on the challenges embedded in tour guiding as a profession where job unpredictability, low financial and professional recognition, and problematic social life determine unfavorable conditions (Ababneh, 2017; Ap & Wong, 2001; Cohen, 1985; Gavino & Martinez, 2010; Guerrier & Adib, 2003; Hwang et al., 2014; Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013; Mak et al., 2011; Melubo & Buzinde, 2016; Min, 2014).

However, throughout the research process, the peripheral workers interviewed have often manifested a sense of detachment and disregard on the part of the STA concerning their evaluation and treatment as internal customers, which suggests that the poor internal marketing strategy of the company has great influence on the context understudy.

I mean, once they (referring to the managers) make a profit out of the trip, they are done. The customers are happy, that's all they care about! We are the ones making it happen though! And considering what we go through to deliver a trip successfully . . . well, we are not treated the way we deserve. (Participant 5, 18–21)

#### *HR Framework: Internal Marketing*

Secondary resources show a variety of internal marketing strategies that can be implemented as to develop the HR practices of businesses such as the STA understudy: perceived organizational support, empowerment and decision-making authority of the workforce, career development and training programs, compensations, cross-training, and internalization (Ababneh, 2017; Ap & Wong, 2001; Beech & Chadwick, 2006; Cohen, 1985; Gavino & Martinez, 2010; Guerrier & Adib, 2003; Kalleberg,

2000; Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013; Mak et al., 2011; Min, 2014; Prayag & Hosany, 2015).

The adoption of the above-mentioned solutions entails the integration of various departments within the organization, such as marketing, management, communication, and human resources (Kotler et al., 2014), resulting in the enhancement of the company's internal marketing strategy. The internal marketing approach is based on the perception of employees as customers (Baum, 2008; Kusluvan et al., 2010; Kotler et al., 2014). More precisely, it finds roots in the assumption that in order to deliver high quality services to the company's external customers, it is necessary to satisfy the needs and demands of internal customers by designing job opportunities that attract and develop the employees, and by creating a set of positive values that apply to both external and internal clients (Beech & Chadwick, 2006; Kusluvan et al., 2010; Tag-Eldeen & Elsaid, 2011). Hence, internal marketing is believed to encourage and enhance the employees' performances which, in turn, has positive impact on those factors that determine the company's organizational performance: customer value, product and service quality, and customer satisfaction (Joseph, 1996; Kusluvan et al., 2010; Tag-Eldeen & Elsaid, 2011).

In order to promote an internal marketing plan within the organizational culture landscape of the company, it is important to encourage the personification of employees with their organization by adopting a perceived organizational support strategy. However, participants claimed that their degree of integration within the company is remote:

It is two separate worlds really. They do their job, send us a spreadsheet and a road book and that's it. That's all the interaction we have with the office before leaving for an event. (Participant 9, 10–11)

The above implicates that the noncontingent workers' poor interaction with the company acts as a barrier in the fosterage of a positive organizational culture landscape where the employees experience attachment to the company, feeling valued and supported. Ensuring perceived organizational support means fulfilling the employees' emotional needs for acceptance and socially recognized incorporation in the teamwork (Akgunduz & Bardakoglu, 2017; Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003; Kusluvan

et al., 2010; Nickson, 2013), which as a result is believed to improve the affective attachment to the company (Allen et al., 2003; Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-La Mastro, 1990; Kusluvan et al., 2010; Lashley, 2002; Tag-Eldeen & El Said, 2011). In fact, the organizational support theory asserts that putting emphasis on interactional justice—the set of organizational procedures that regulate the interpersonal interactions within the work environment—is a key element for fostering positive working behaviors among the employees (Allen et al., 2003; Baum, 2008; M. Cheung & Law, 2008; Gavino et al., 2010; Hughes & Rog, 2008).

Although interpersonal justice refers to the degree of dignity and respect with which employees are treated, informational justice pertains to the level and adequacy of shared information within the organization (Allen et al., 2003; Beech & Chadwick, 2006; Evans et al., 2003). The relevance of these two components of interactional justice confirms that the successful implementation of internal marketing actions requires strong commitment from the managers, who must show a positive attitude towards the employees (Beech & Chadwick, 2006; M. Cheung & Law, 2008; Costen et al., 2010; Kotler et al., 2014; Van De Vorde et al., 2016). More specifically, it further stresses the crucial role and responsibility of the operations manager, as primary interpersonal and informational contact available to tour guides (Gavino et al., 2010), in determining the tour guides' positive perception of the tour/event operator. As one of the participants suggested, the operations managers' failures in efficiently engage with the peripheral workers determines negative feelings that the employees then project on the company as a whole.

It's degrading really. I have seen X [the Manager] once on a Skype call, and heard from him three times over phone since I started working for the company. How are we supposed to feel like our job is valued and the company cares about us if he is not interested in knowing who we are, what we do and what we need? (Participant 10, 55–57)

*The Key to the Improvement of HR Practices: Operation Managers*

The literature review and the data collected highlight the central role that Operations Managers play

in ensuring the correct implementation of human resources practices within the companies that operate in the hospitality, tourism, sport, and leisure industries (Ababneh, 2017; Ap & Wong, 2001; Beech & Chadwick, 2006; Boella, 2013; Costen et al., 2010; Evans et al., 2003; Kalleberg, 2000; Gavino et al., 2010; Guerrier & Adib, 2003; Hwang et al., 2014; Kotler et al., 2014; Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013; Mak et al., 2011; Melubo & Buzinde, 2016; Min, 2014). This means that in the first place the Operations Manager needs to acknowledge his responsibility in achieving the attraction, retention, training, motivation, and commitment of the appropriate labor force by designing, forecasting, monitoring, and developing the company's resources, with a particular concern for the employees' professional, social, and financial welfare (Beech & Chadwick, 2006; Boella, 2013; Costen et al., 2010; Hughes & Rog, 2008; Hwang et al., 2014; Kotler et al., 2014).

I called in to say I was exhausted from the June trips . . . I was speaking on behalf of the other guys as well. I just wanted a couple of days off for the team before leaving to set up for the Norway events, with the Etape coming straight after. I told him we are understaffed for that trip . . . that it's risky for that sort of sportive event, and we are not in condition to cover for others. It was like talking to the wind. I could tell he (the Manager) wasn't taking me seriously. He thinks we are just moaning all the time. (Participant 1, 37–42)

The above indirectly suggests that managers need to recognize and acknowledge the needs and motives that drive the individual employees by engaging in an open and constructive dialogue with them. This also brings out the need for improved interaction among employees at all level of the organization as a means to manifest the company's concern for the difficult work conditions that tour guiding entails. In fact, experts point out the vital importance of effective ongoing communication in the work place (Boella, 2013; Hwang et al., 2014; Kotler et al., 2014; Kusluvan et al., 2010; MacKenzie & Kerr 2013; Park, 2016; Van De Vorde et al., 2016), especially in cases like the one under study, where the tour guides suffer from feeling disregarded and emotionally left out.

It sounds silly, but sometimes showing interest could really mean a lot to us . . . especially

1 considering we give up our social life for this job.  
 2 It is hard to keep my guys motivated on the road  
 3 when after signing the contract they don't hear  
 4 from the office anymore. (Participant 3, 22–24)

5  
 6 In order to minimize such perceived marginal-  
 7 ization, it is suggested that managers increase their  
 8 attention to employee communication as a way of  
 9 involving the staff in the organization's goals while  
 10 reflecting the company's interest and appreciation  
 11 of the workforce (Beech & Chadwick, 2006; Kotler  
 12 et al., 2014).

13 For what concerns the complicated manager-  
 14 employee relationships that result from having  
 15 temporary workers on multiple job sites (Kalle-  
 16 berg, 2000), the adoption of a more decentralized  
 17 organizational structure has been recommended as  
 18 to tackle the difficulties encountered in supervising  
 19 and monitoring tour guides while at events (Evans  
 20 et al., 2003; Kotler et al., 2014; Mohr & Zoghi,  
 21 2008). Not only would this reduce the work load  
 22 of Operations Managers by diverging some of their  
 23 many responsibilities to other subunits of the orga-  
 24 nization, but also it would entail the empowerment  
 25 of tour guides with some degree of decision-mak-  
 26 ing authority, which in turn would increase their job  
 27 satisfaction, engagement, and commitment to the  
 28 company (Baum, 2008; Beech & Chadwick, 2006;  
 29 Evans et al., 2003; Kotler et al., 2014; Kusluvan et  
 30 al., 2010; Mohr & Zoghi, 2008; Park, 2016; Van De  
 31 Vorde et al., 2016). Also, this would reduce con-  
 32 siderably the time necessary to take key decisions  
 33 related to on-the-road events and accidents that  
 34 need a prompt and proactive response.

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 36 I think they perceive us as "legs" only. Our capac-  
 37 ity and expertise of delivering and finalizing a  
 38 product they have created in the office is not  
 39 recognized. Have they ever sat down listening to  
 40 OUR feedback at the end of a trip . . . our points of  
 41 view on how we can improve the next trip? At the  
 42 end of the day it is us running the tours, being at  
 43 the events. (Participant 1, 81–84)

44 Demonstrating the organization's genuine com-  
 45 mitment to the well-being of employees through  
 46 direct communication is believed to inspire and  
 47 spur the workers to deliver high quality perfor-  
 48 mances (Beech & Chadwick, 2006; Kusluvan et al.,  
 49 2010; Van De Vorde et al., 2016).

### *The Need for Compensations*

This leads to the consideration of having a perfor-  
 mance evaluation schedule in place, as a means of  
 assessing and rewarding the delivery of quality per-  
 formances (Ap & Wong, 2001; Gavino et al., 2010;  
 Kotler et al., 2014; Kulsuvan et al., 2010). Such  
 human resource practice stresses once again the key  
 role of Operations Managers, being the ones who  
 conduct the review and appraisal, in ensuring high  
 levels of motivation and commitment among the  
 tour guides, which translate in positive job attitude,  
 expectation, and sense of accomplishment (Allen et  
 al., 2003; Baum, 2008; Beech & Chadwick, 2006;  
 Costen et al., 2010; Gavino et al., 2010; Guerrier  
 & Lockwood, 1989; Kotler et al., 2014; Kusluvan  
 et al., 2010). This form of compensation is verbal,  
 and it aims at recognizing that the achievement of  
 the company's organizational goals depends on the  
 contribution of each of the team members, regard-  
 less the role within the company.

I have rarely been complimented on a successful  
 trip or feedback from the customers. Not to men-  
 tion financial rewards. (Participant 6, 28–29)

And

Hah! Sometimes we laugh with the guys . . . we  
 think of us as soldiers. It is us winning the battles,  
 but we never receive the merit. The office guys go  
 out celebrating on a successful trip every Friday  
 night, while we wash the bikes and set them up for  
 the following trip! (Participant 4, 78–81)

Financial compensation should also be com-  
 bined to verbal one, as a way of rewarding the tour  
 guides' hard labor with material appraisals (Allen  
 et al., 2003; Baum, 2008; Beech & Chadwick,  
 2006; Gavino et al., 2010; Kotler et al., 2014; Kus-  
 luvan et al., 2010). Both tangible and intangible  
 compensations are bound to ensure the employees'  
 commitment to the organization with effective con-  
 sequences on the turnover rate (Allen et al., 2003;  
 Baum, 2008; Beech & Chadwick, 2006; Hughes  
 & Rog, 2008); the same way external marketing  
 strategies ensure the customers' loyalty by design-  
 ing programmes that reward the customers' good  
 conduct towards the organization. Adequate com-  
 pensation also implies the ability of the company  
 to avoid missing the payment deadlines, a factor



that often lies at the core of the tour guides' sense of frustration (Gavino et al., 2010; MacKenzie & Kerr, 2013; Mak et al., 2011; Melubo & Buzinde, 2016). Therefore, the administration department should be concerned with ensuring timely pays by carefully monitoring and forecasting the cash flow of the organization.

*Development of the Human Side:  
Emotions and Empathy*

In addition to the above solutions, attention should be given to the several studies that show that the ability to manage occupational stress in the work environment is inversely related to low productivity, episodes of absenteeism, burnout, and turnover (S. Cheung, Gong, & Huang, 2016; Dimitriades, 2017; Goleman, 1995; Hwang et al., 2014; Lindebaum, 2013; Min, 2014; Min & Peng, 2012; Newton, Teo, Pick, Ho, & Thomas, 2016).

It is stressful and it can consume you. Simon (a former tour guide), last year . . . he kind of lost it at the Haute Route. It was his fourth consecutive event. I called the office to tell them we had to take him to the hospital for a nervous breakdown. His brother flew from the UK to take him back home and have him seen by a specialist. (Participant 2, 96–100)

Because the very nature of tour guiding as a form of employment is based on the events seasonality and doesn't allow for the deployment of conventional techniques for managing emotions such as work breaks and conventional shifts (Kotler et al., 2010), providing preemployment and on-the-job trainings on emotional intelligence (Dimitriades, 2017; Goleman, 1995; Kay & Neilson, 2012; MacKenzie & Kerr, 2013; Min, 2014; Min & Peng, 2012; Newton et al., 2016) could be a winning solution to minimize those issues arising from the inability of detecting, expressing, and managing personal emotions, as well as those of people who surround us (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013; Goleman, 1995; Min, 2014; Tsai & Lee, 2014). The emotional intelligence development program would provide the attendants with the appropriate theories and tools for the effective management of stressful work conditions and contingency situations (Cheung et al., 2016; Goel & Hussein, 2015;

Newton et al., 2016; Slaski & Cartwright, 2003). In fact, Goleman's (1995) findings on the beneficial impacts of emotional intelligence trainings within the work environment corroborated the relevance of such emerging human resource trend for the achievement of competitive advantage, especially in customer-oriented and experience-based industries (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013; Dimitriades, 2017; Goel & Hussein, 2015; Tsai & Lee, 2014).

We ride all day long for over 3 weeks at times. We finish one trip and we are straight into another one, without even catching a breath . . . it's not just the cycling itself to be honest. It's more about being constantly busy with keeping demanding customers happy, while dealing with the daily hitches of operating a complex event. (Participant 3, 12–15)

And

They (referring to the office-based workers) will never understand what it feels like to have an intercontinental call at 4 am to inform your customer's wife that he injured himself during the race event and he is now being taken to intensive care . . . he could have died under my responsibility. (Participant 1, 101–103)

Lastly, with regards to the inconsistent and ambiguous relationships among coworkers (Gavino et al., 2010; MacKenzie & Kerr, 2013; Min, 2014), which are due to the hybrid arrangements that tour guides have with the company, it may be worth considering the planning and implementation of a job rotation schedule (Beech & Chadwick, 2006; Evans et al., 2003; Kotler et al., 2014). The enhancement of perceived organizational support would be facilitated by providing all the member of the staff with an understanding of the activities that characterize the different job positions and landscapes (Campion, Cheraskin, & Stevens, 1994; Cannon-Bowers, Salas, Blickensderfer, & Bowers, 1998; HRfocus, 2008; Park, 2016), as to create internal empathy and reduce the perceived physical and emotional distance among core and peripheral employees (Campion et al., 1994; Park, 2016).

Sometimes it feels like we are alone out here. The guys in the office are great at their job, but they don't see the effort that is needed on the road as well. Arranging for hotels, restaurants, race entries

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logistics, and event set-ups . . . it doesn't prevent incidents from happening. And when they do happen, it is us facing the consequences and dealing with the pressure. (Participant 1, 65–69)

Moreover, job rotation would spontaneously turn out to be a cross-training practice (Ho, Chang, Shih, & Liang, 2009; HRFocus, 2008; Park, 2016), which would prove to be beneficial for the implementation of the empowerment strategy as well (Cannon-Bowers et al., 1998; HRFocus, 2008). In fact, by periodically internalizing the tour guides within the office environment, it would be possible for them to familiarize with the activities of the office-based staff through an alternative form of career development program, which in turn would foster job motivation (HRFocus, 2008; Ho et al., 2009; Park, 2016; Saravani & Abbasi, 2013). Simultaneously, the same approach should be applied to the full-time office employees by including them in the delivery of the trips. Not only would this provide the office staff with the satisfaction of seeing their work materialized, but it would also equip them with an understanding of the practicalities of tour and event running, as to expand their theoretical expertise on the planning.

How could they know, if they are never on the road with us, doing what we do for half of the year instead of filling in excel sheets? (Participant 9, 41–42)

And

I have always wanted to have a chance to see how it actually works, I mean, being on the trip, with the customers. It would help having an overview of the whole package, of our job in the office and of the one of the guides. Maybe, experiencing what actually happens on the road could help me getting on with the job, and anticipate some of the needs of the guys onsite (referring to the peripheral workers). (Participant 11, 53–57)

Therefore, such process of job enrichment would bring benefits to both groups of employees, as it would train additional skills while fostering flexibility and multitasking (Campion et al., 1994; Cannon-Bowers et al., 1998; HRFocus, 2008; Saravani & Abbasi, 2013), which may be exploited in emergency contingencies. Beside reinforcing the

emotional intelligence of the organization's employees by creating sustainable team building real-life activities (Campion et al., 1994; HRFocus, 2008; Park, 2016; Saravani & Abbasi, 2013), it may be worth mentioning that this strategy could be used in event and tourism businesses as a way of preventing knowledge and experience loss whenever one of those individual suppliers, such as a tour leader whose expertise is critical to the successful running of a specific product, leave the company (Evans et al., 2003; HRFocus, 2008).

#### *Managerial Implications for the Event Sector*

To sum up the above in more practical terms, by strategically rethinking the job arrangements under a more flexible and creative prospective and by evaluating the most common HR practices deployed in the tourism and event industries, it is possible to identify a series of solutions that would help achieve organizational commitment and attachment, while enhancing the cohesiveness between the employees, as well as the company's internal marketing. More precisely, the promotion of perceived organizational support theory through *improved communication and compensation* (Allen et al., 2003; Baum, 2008; Beech & Chadwick, 2006; M. Cheung & Law, 2008; Gavino et al., 2010; Kalleberg, 2000; Kotler et al., 2014; Kuslivan et al., 2010), the introduction of *emotional intelligence trainings* (Dimitriades, 2017; Goleman, 1995; Kay & Nelison, 2012; MacKenzie & Kerr, 2013; Min, 2014; Newton et al., 2016; Tsai & Lee, 2014), and the implementation of *job rotation* schedules (Beech & Chadwick, 2006; Evans et al., 2003; Kotler et al., 2014) have been identified as effective strategies to foster a positive work environment for both core and peripheral workers. Also, the *Manager's positive attitude and commitment* have been stressed as key factors for the correct implementation of the suggested solutions (Costen et al., 2010; Gavino et al., 2010; Kotler et al., 2014; Mckenzie & Kerr, 2013; Min, 2014).

Arguably, the identified issues and recommendations are transferable to those hotels, tour operators, event companies, and festival producers that, due to the nature of the respective industries, have to rely on external workers, freelancers, and contractors.

### Conclusion

This study considered the challenges encountered by organizations operating within the events and tourism industry in managing and coordinating core and peripheral workers (Ababneh, 2017; Baum, 2008; Beech & Chadwick, 2006; Evans et al., 2003; Hughes & Rog, 2008; Kusluvan et al., 2010). It has done so by using a cycling tour operator based in the UK (STA) as a case study, with the purpose to broaden our understanding of HR issues and to forward recommendations for HR-related practices that are arguably transferrable to tourism, hospitality, leisure, and event organizations. The core problem of the company under study has been that of retaining the noncontingent workers of the tours and events; namely, tour leader, guides, mechanics, and masseurs, whose performance quality has proved to be essential for the achievement of the organization's goals and mission.

The research findings on the issues that characterize this category of employees are in alignment with the several international studies that have been conducted on tourism-related HR practices in developing countries (Ababneh, 2017; Ap & Wong, 2001; Cohen, 1985; Gavino et al., 2010; Guerrier & Adib, 2003; Mak et al., 2011; Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013; Melubo & Buzinde, 2016; Min, 2014). Occupational and emotional stress, low professional motivation and satisfaction, job insecurity, limited interactions with the core workers, inadequate verbal and financial rewards, and lack of training have been identified as the causes for the general discontent among the participants.

Ultimately, the study argues that the adoption of HR practices that aim at enhancing the company's internal marketing would entail an optimistic shift in the peripheral workers' perception of their position within the organization, resulting in improved product delivery and reduced absenteeism, burn-out, and turnover episodes.

### Limitations and Future Research

As with all research projects, this one also bears some inherent limitations. This study focused on one (small) case organization that specialized in cycling tours and events. Further research would be necessary as to explore a larger sample

by incorporating multiple organizations. Not only would this enable to test the generalization and validity of the findings of this study, but it could also further corroborate the need for industries subjected to seasonality factors and dependent on front line employees to implement more efficient HR practices that would facilitate the management of core and peripheral workers at event-based trips. Also, investigating organizations specializing in different event and tourism products (i.e., adventure, cultural, religious, creative) would bring light on the work-related factors that contribute to or impact on the occupational and emotional stress of peripheral job roles (i.e., physical workload, health and safety issues, level of education).

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