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Transformative hospitality services: A conceptualization and development of organizational dimensions

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ABSTRACT

The hospitality industry increasingly adopted well-being practices. However, academic literature has neglected to understand how hospitality organizations design services to improve well-being for customers, employees, communities, and societal and environmental well-being. This paper develops a novel concept, Transformative Hospitality Services (THS), which emanates from an ecosystem view and considers hospitality services as holding the possibility to transform the well-being of various constituents. Building on insights from in-depth interviews with industry experts, this paper identifies organizational dimensions that foster hospitality organizations' transformative services offerings. Data also reveal facilitators and barriers for hospitality organizations to consider when developing THS offerings. A four-stage journey map is proposed to assess hospitality organizations' journey towards becoming more transformative. As a result, this research presents contributions to transformative service research by advancing the concept of THS. Additionally, this research offers practical guidance for hospitality organizations through the development of the THS dimensions and journey map.

1. Introduction

In recent years, as a response to a call to action for businesses to help with global problems and improve individual health and happiness, hospitality organizations have started redesigning their offerings to contribute to well-being outcomes (Kyricos, 2019). Many hospitality organizations around the world have launched new initiatives like guest rooms with fitness equipment, a running concierge service, healthy menus packed with “superfoods,” and well-being seminars (Hardcastle, 2020). However, such well-being efforts have been criticized for being limited in two ways and thus creating “well-washing” (Martinsdottir, 2020). First, their scope is limited with highlights merely on healthy features or amenities without really offering substantial benefits for other aspects of customers' well-being. Second, more importantly, their

target of efforts has been limited to mainly customers and employees while, to a large extent, ignoring other actors in their ecosystem (Kara et al., 2013). Given that such a narrow focus in terms of scope and target could negatively affect collective well-being outcomes (Leo et al., 2019), there is a need for a different approach for hospitality organizations to achieve their intended goals and contribute to the well-being of all stakeholders.

This narrow view of well-being is not unique to hospitality organizations (Leo et al., 2019). The interlinkages between different levels of well-being outcomes in a service ecosystem, and how they contribute to overall collective well-being have rarely been explored (Gallan et al., 2019). This oversight is important as the well-being of all actors in a service ecosystem are interdependent, and achieving a collective well-being, in turn, influences outcomes that relate to individual well-being

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(Leo et al., 2019). Therefore, assuming a holistic approach to well-being is critical to accomplishing well-being outcomes for all stakeholders in a service ecosystem, ranging from individuals (customers and employees), to communities, societies, and environment.

There is in particular an increasing pressure for the hospitality industry to adopt a holistic approach and offer more transformative services, as the increased societal expectation for the global hospitality industry to assume greater social responsibilities is evident (Abaeian, Khong, Yeoh, & McCabe, 2019). The potential of the hospitality industry to bring important changes to the environment and society is well recognized, given its stronger ties with these elements than many other industries (Serra-Cantalops et al., 2017). As such, this paper proposes that hospitality organizations need to adopt a more holistic view of well-being by offering hospitality services that hold the potential to not only achieve individual well-being for their customers and employees, but also contribute to community, societal, and environmental well-being.

However, while there is some evidence of hospitality organizations adopting holistic practices that aim toward creation of well-being for different stakeholders, academic literature fails to offer any guidelines regarding how those organizations can design and deliver such services. One reason for this could be the lack of a conceptual framework to guide hospitality organizations to adopt a more holistic approach to well-being. To fill the gap, this paper offers a novel concept, Transformative Hospitality Services (THS), that highlights hospitality organizations' potential to simultaneously contribute to well-being outcomes of multiple stakeholders through various hospitality-related activities including leisure, recreation, sport, spa, wellness, travel, health care, and others. The uniqueness of this concept comes from the fact that it adopts an ecosystem view of hospitality services. We recognize that offering such transformative hospitality services should be an aspiration for many organizations as they may not currently recognize that their service offerings can be transformative and may never fully achieve a completely transformative state.

Altogether, derived from the review of literature and empirical setting, this study has the following research objectives:

Articulate a definition of THS that captures a holistic view of well-being.

Explore how hospitality organizations are responding to and contributing to well-being trends in their industry.

Develop a framework of THS dimensions that can describe and evaluate the transformative capabilities of hospitality organizations. Depict a transformative journey with respective development stages of transformative hospitality organizations as suggested by THS dimensions.

Addressing the above research objectives, this paper makes the following contributions. First, it introduces a novel concept, i.e., THS to the services and hospitality literatures based on a relatively comprehensive list of well-being dimensions and corresponding indicators emanating from various well-being literature. Using an extensive review of literature and qualitative data collected from industry experts, the paper also identified organizational dimensions that that may act as enablers or barriers to hospitality organizations' transformative services offerings. Finally, based on those dimensions, this research develops a four-stage journey map for organizations to self-assess where they are in their journey toward becoming a transformative organization. As a result, this research has both theoretical and practical implications for better understanding, designing, and delivering transformative services. Next, this paper provides the conceptual and contextual development necessary to support our conceptualization of THS. This is followed by an explanation of the research methods and empirical data collection, discussion of results, and concludes with thoughts on THS and organizational journeys.

2. Conceptual development

In this section, we briefly provide a review of hospitality services, followed by an examination of the concept of well-being and its elements and dimensions, and finally a review of well-being practices in hospitality services.

Originally a philosophical and sociological concept, well-being over the past few decades has been studied by an extensive range of subjects including psychology, health sciences, and economics (Smith & Diekmann, 2017). Recently, improving well-being has gained traction as one of the key objectives in service research (Ostrom et al., 2015). However, most of the service research to date has either focused on individual well-being of consumers or employees while ignoring well-being at other levels of a service ecosystem, or they do not consider the interactions between actors at different levels in the service system (Gallan et al., 2019). This simplistic approach ignores the fact that well-being created at each level is affected by and contributes to well-being at other levels (Leo et al., 2019), and also fails to provide a deeper understanding of well-being outcomes (Anderson et al., 2013).

By adopting a service system's perspective, scholars have gradually recognized well-being as a *multi-dimensional* and *multi-level* concept and advocated for a more holistic understanding of well-being (Frow et al., 2019; Tuzovic et al., 2021). Taking such a holistic approach makes it possible to have a better understanding of the interrelationships between actors at different levels in a service system (e.g., micro, meso, macro) that lead to various well-being outcomes. Therefore, such an approach recognizes that individuals not only can influence each other's well-being status, but also can shape well-being outcomes at other levels like community-level (Gallan et al., 2019), or society-level well-being, ultimately impacting the environment. In other words, such a cross-level holistic conceptualization of well-being contributes to the knowledge about how the overall well-being emerges (Leo et al., 2019). Finally, the holistic approach is also critical to understanding of how individual well-being interacts with well-being outcomes at other levels, which allows more effective interventions being developed to improve well-being for all actors in a service system (Gallan et al., 2019).

Given its size and importance for the global economy, there is a public demand for the hospitality industry to look beyond the individual level and adopt a more holistic approach to include stakeholders beyond customers and employees when creating well-being initiatives (Abaeian et al., 2019). In fact, such a holistic approach to well-being would provide various benefits for hospitality organizations themselves as well. First, incorporating the well-being of macro-level stakeholders into hospitality industry's strategies and practices can be a preventative approach in response to the climate change and associated threats looming ahead, such as the increased occurrence of extreme weather events and higher likelihood of infectious disease emergence and re-emergence (Jones & Comfort, 2020). Second, a holistic approach aids a hospitality business in gaining investors' and stakeholders' attention and building its public reputation. It has been proved that a company with initiatives taking care of all levels of stakeholders can better acquire, maintain, and enhance its legitimacy perceived by the public (Abaeian et al., 2019). Third, the vital value for hospitality businesses to serve the well-being of all stakeholders also lies in the boost of business resilience to disasters like COVID-19. Evidence shows how hospitality businesses care for their customers, employees, and more importantly local communities and societies at large in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, tend to better protect their firm value in spite of the pandemic hit (Qiu et al., 2021; Tuzovic et al., 2021).

While there is a growing trend of hospitality organizations adopting a holistic approach to well-being practices (see Appendix A for exemplars of existing practices), academic literature fails to offer guidelines regarding how those organizations can design and deliver hospitality services to improve well-being of not only their customers and employees, but also of their communities and society at large including natural environment as well. One reason for this could be the lack of a

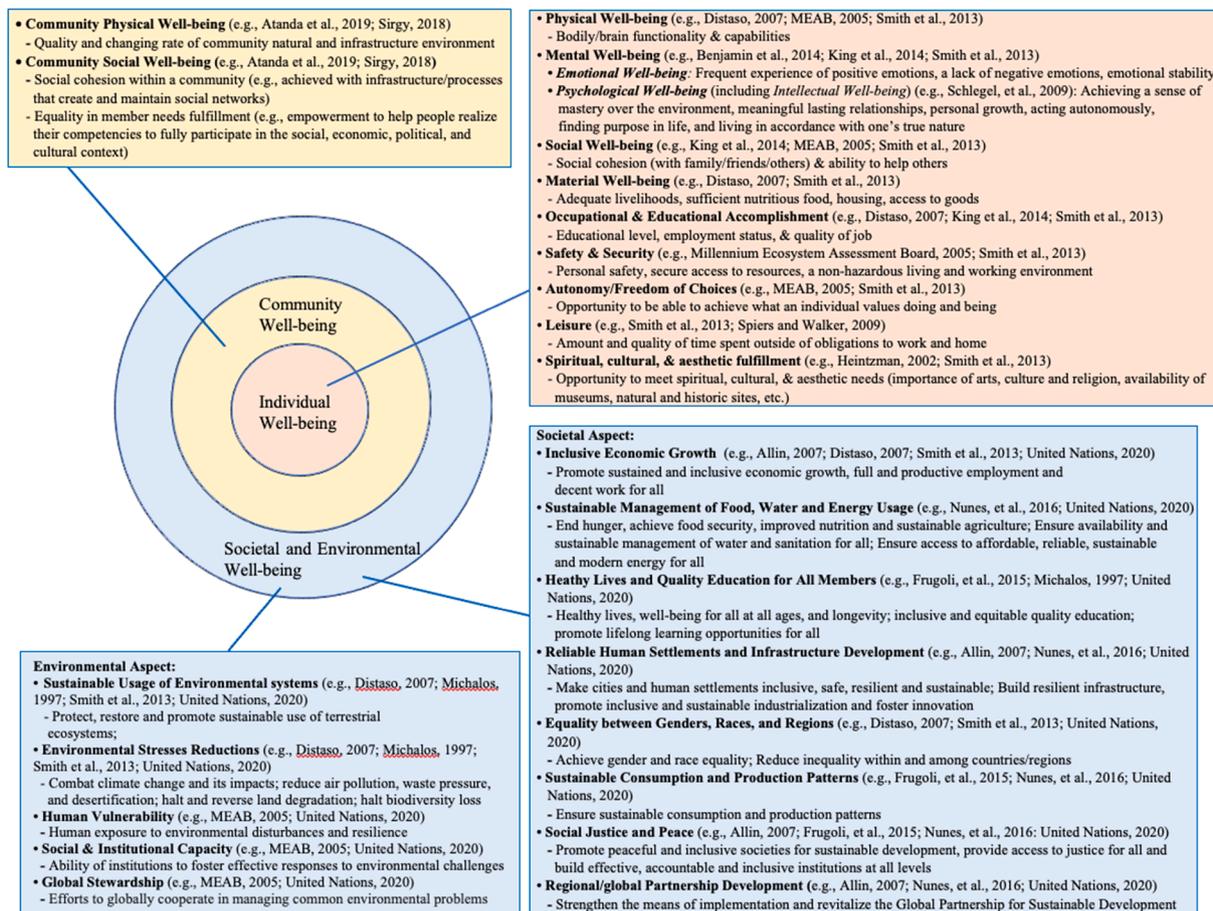


Fig. 1. Synthesized holistic well-being dimensions and indices.

conceptualization to guide hospitality organizations to adopt a more holistic well-being approach. To contribute to this gap, following the recommendations from recent literature, this paper adopts a holistic approach to well-being in the context of hospitality services by including various well-being dimensions at different levels of a service system, and offers a novel construct.

Fig. 1 provides a summary of different well-being dimensions and indicators that we synthesized and developed from the rich body of existing literature related to well-being. To construct this figure, a literature search was conducted through Google Scholar of journal articles and reports by credible organizations (e.g., United Nations and Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Board), using a variety of key words intended to capture different disciplines with extensive explorations on well-being related topics (well-being, wellness, happiness, quality of life, life satisfaction, health, welfare, sustainable development/sustainability, and corporate social responsibilities). Given recent progress in well-being research, recent literature (1990–2020) was given priority. One of the authors carefully read through the abstracts of identified literature and filtered out the less relevant articles, eventually resulting in over 200 articles and reports that created the dimensions and indicators in Fig. 1. The articles and reports cover a broad array of disciplines, ranging from psychology to sociology, economics, geography, urban/regional planning, environmental management, business administration, and tourism/hospitality studies. It is worth noting that the intention of the literature synthesis was not to provide the most comprehensive review of relevant literature but rather to identify diverse facets of well-being that hospitality organizations should be aware of as they engage in a THS journey.

In addition, we borrowed concepts from the sustainability literature to identify the dimensions and indicators at the societal-environmental

level as the empirical work will develop a model of how THS can be accomplished (e.g., Bolton, 2021). The corresponding indicators attached to each dimension in the figure demonstrate more concrete objectives to pursue to improve the well-being for each dimension. Scholars have gradually recognized well-being as a *multi-dimensional* and *multi-level* concept and advocated for a more holistic understanding of it: “The evaluative judgments about selected aspects or the entirety of a life situation or life path, for an individual, group or society” (Gasper, 2010, p. 359).

At the individual level, well-being is conceived as living well and “has to do with people’s physical, social, and mental conditions, the fulfillment of their basic needs and capabilities, and the opportunities and resources to which they have access” (King et al., 2014, p. 683). Namely, it is comprised of the resources people have (e.g., material/physical/social), what they are capable of doing with these resources, and how they perceive the former two (McGregor et al., 2015). The specific dimensions that embody individual well-being are: (1) physical health, (2) mental health (i.e., emotional and psychological well-being), (3) social well-being, (4) material well-being, (5) occupational and educational accomplishment, (6) safety and security, (7) leisure, (8) spiritual, cultural, and aesthetic fulfillment, and (9) autonomy (Hagerty et al., 2001; King et al., 2014; Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Board, 2005; Ryff, 2014).

In addition, scholars have recognized well-being as socio-culturally and ecologically embedded (Balmford & Bond, 2005; White, 2014), which suggests the need to consider well-being dimensions of higher levels – those of community, society, and the environment. This is largely due to the concern that an imbalanced concentration on individual-level well-being detracts from examining broader issues, such as social justice or protecting the environment for future generations

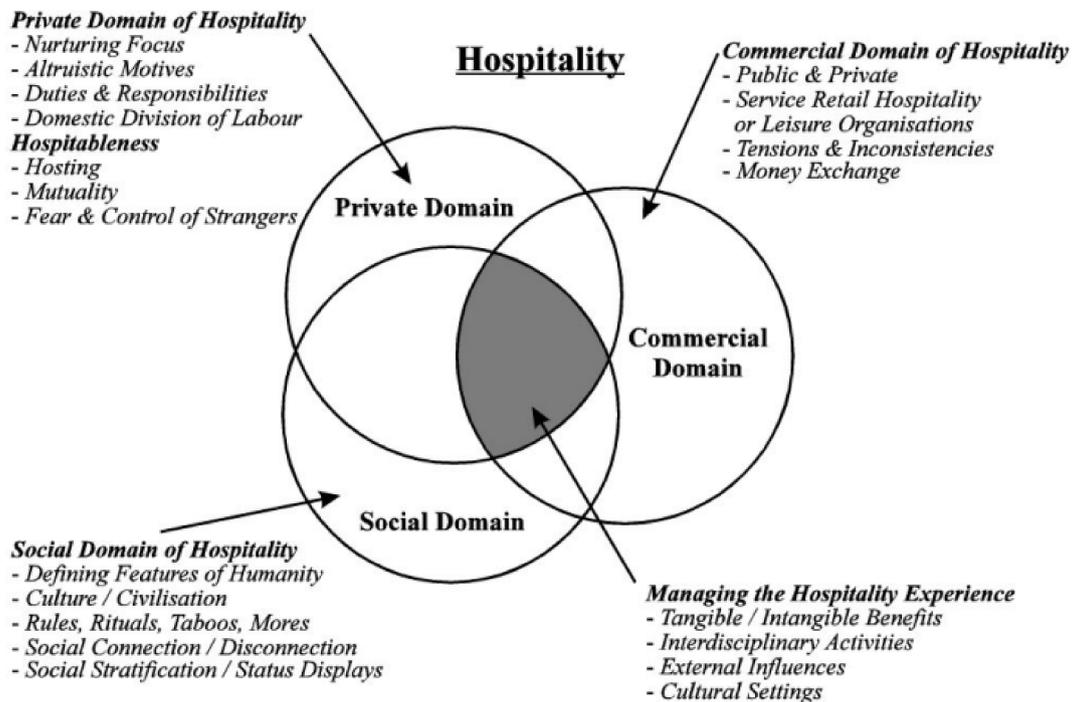


Fig. 2. Hospitality activities (reprinted with permission from Lashley, 2000).

(Robeyns & Van der Veen, 2007; Sirgy, 2018).

While most existing well-being literature has focused on individual-level well-being, a smaller portion of research has examined well-being through a macro-level lens (Kjell, 2011). Relevant macro-level explorations can be found in literature on sustainable development, where interdependent economic, environmental, and sociocultural components contribute to the healthy progress of humans and the environment (Allin, 2007). Naturally, the community, societal, and environmental dimensions of well-being are also captured in the assessment of three sustainability pillars – economic, sociocultural, and environmental (Purvis et al., 2019).

Community well-being concerns the quality of lives in a specific community (Sirgy, 2018). Societal well-being indicates how a society in general is doing (Allin, 2007). Each are identified as a systemic concept that should be indicated beyond the sum of individual community/societal members' well-being status (Benjamin et al., 2014). Community-level well-being demands both a quality physical environment (e.g., community, natural, and infrastructure environment) and a quality social environment (i.e., social cohesion and equality within the community) (Hagerty et al., 2001; Magis & Shinn, 2009; Sirgy, 2018). Societal well-being dimensions are broader in scope, with examples of inclusive economic growth, sustainable management of food, water, and energy usage (environmental concerns), healthy lives and quality education for all, sustainable consumption and production patterns, and regional/global partnership development, etc. (Benjamin et al., 2014; Bolton, 2021; Smith et al., 2013; United Nations, 2020).

Scholars are increasingly realizing the necessity of assessing and enhancing environmental well-being along with human well-being dimensions, due to their mutual influences on each other (Knight & Rosa, 2011; Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Board, 2005; Nisbet & Gick, 2008). For instance, ecosystem changes can lead to a shrinking diversity of available livelihood options, which then may negatively affect community resilience and adaptability of communities to cope with environmental changes (Fontalvo-Herazo et al., 2007). Some well-being explorations are attempting to incorporate components of the natural environment into well-being assessments. One example is the Happy Planet Index (Abdallah & Shah, 2012), which is an aggregated well-being index integrated with an ecological footprint assessment.

Based on these reviews of various literature, we now deliver on the first research objective by defining *Transformative Hospitality Services (THS)* as *services that are offered and delivered by hospitality organizations that are designed to cocreate holistic well-being not only for customers but also for employees, the community, and society at large*. Since environmental transformations broadly impact societies, we include the environment at the societal well-being level. In fact, the uniqueness of this concept comes from the fact that it adopts an ecosystem view of hospitality services and considers well-being outcomes for all different levels in that ecosystem.

3. Methods

The literature review shed light on the necessity of further research explorations of THS. Specifically, research is needed to delineate how hospitality service organizations differ in terms of their transformative capabilities. This research started with the pre-empirical setting that included a literature review. Next, this section first explores the definition and scope of hospitality services to provide a common understanding of the research context. Because TSR in the context of hospitality services is a developing area, this research utilized a **qualitative case research method** that underpins interpretative research methodology (Dubé & Paré, 2003). Using this approach (Beverland & Lindgreen, 2010; Lindgreen, 2001), the empirical research process consisted of four steps: designing the research, collecting the data, analyzing the data, and answering the research questions (contained in the Results section).

3.1. Research context: Definition and scope of hospitality services

The definition of hospitality service has evolved over time. In many English-speaking countries, the word 'hospitality' has been used to describe hotel and catering services, leading to an exploration of these commercial sectors from a social-science perspective (Lashley, 2008). Jones (2002) has defined hospitality services as the provision of services related to shelter, warmth, or kindness to visitors. Unfortunately, words like "making guests feel welcome," "kindness," and "generosity" depict a limited and unstructured view of hospitality services, making it too loose

for the purpose at hand. In comparison, the contemporary hospitality-related literature provides a specific and structured definitions of hospitality service. While stating hospitality is more than providing a comfortable bed and preparing good food, Cassee and Reuland (1983, p. 144) define hospitality as “a harmonious mixture of food, beverage, and/or shelter, a physical environment, and the behavior and attitude of people.” Moreover, King (1995) discussed four distinct characteristics of modern hospitality services including (i) it is rendered from a host to a guest who is away from home, (ii) it is interactive and inseparable, (iii) it includes tangible and intangible elements, and (iv) host fulfills several needs of the guest (safety, psychological and physiological).

Lashley and Morrison (2000) explored the concept of hospitality under social, private, and commercial domains. Each of these domains are interdependent yet represent a facet of hospitality service provision (see Fig. 2). The social domain provides the social spaces where services are produced and consumed. The private domain relates to the issues related to host–guest relationships, whereas the commercial domain explains the provision of hospitality as an economic activity. While this definition captures the main essence of hospitality, Slattery (2002) has challenged it for excluding important aspects of the industry and state that in hospitality, service providers are businesses and buyers are customers, not guests. Brotherton and Wood (2000, p. 142) relied on the same criticism and proposed one of the most cited definitions of hospitality: “A contemporaneous human exchange, which is voluntarily entered into and designed to enhance the mutual well-being of the parties concerned through the provision of accommodation, and/or food, and/or drink.” Accordingly, Brotherton and Wood (2000, p. 143) define hospitality services as being provided by “commercial organizations that specialize in providing accommodation and/or food, and/or drink through a voluntary human exchange, which is contemporaneous in nature and undertaken to enhance the mutual well-being of the parties concerned.” In terms of its scope, Walker (2019) discussed five different sectors of hospitality services, including lodging, travel, assembly and event management, restaurant and managed services, and recreation.

To conclude, the discussion on the definition and scope of hospitality services have resulted in understanding of the phenomena from a broader perspective. The current literature on hospitality services is limited to understanding the interrelationships between service providers and service consumers, ignoring the role of other important stakeholders in the service ecosystem (Kandampully et al., 2018). Moreover, while the definition of hospitality services proposed by Brotherton and Wood (2000) exclusively mentioned enhancing the mutual well-being of the parties concerned as an integral objective of hospitality, it is one of the least addressed areas in contemporary research in hospitality (Fu et al., 2015). To address these issues, our definition of THS creates an opportunity to advance the understanding of hospitality definition and the role of hospitality organizations in cocreating value with customers.

3.2. Designing the research

A qualitative multi-case research approach (Yin et al., 2020) was chosen to understand a sample of organizations in the hospitality industry. This study adopts an abductive research design (Ullmer, 2018) like deductive or inductive reasoning, abductive reasoning enables the development of a theoretical framework during the research process (Lu & Liu, 2012). An abductive approach is suitable to examine phenomena that are not well understood and can be linked to practice. Our research objectives focus on a problem area in the hospitality industry regarding transformative service offerings.

3.3. Collecting the data

To best explore the research objectives, the authors targeted hospitality organizations that explicitly offered well-being services. In

Table 1
Description of organizations and informants interviewed.

Informant ID	Informant Title	Type of Hospitality Organization	Representative Sector in the Hospitality Industry	Duration of Interview
1	Senior Strategic Advisor	International Luxury Hotel Resort & Spa Brand	Lodging & Accommodation	23:25
2	Executive Director	Convention Center	Meeting	31:40
3	Owner/President	Restaurant	Food	33:53
4	Director of Global Public Relations & Strategic Initiatives	Cruise Lines	Transportation Accommodation	29:23
5	Chief Wellness Officer/General Manager	Upscale Hotel Property	Lodging & Accommodation	33:02
6	Area Talent & Culture Manager	International, Multi-Brand Hotel Group	Lodging & Accommodation	45:29
7	Director of Wellness Operations	Private Club	Club	33:27
8	Senior Director of Global Brand - Wellness	Hotels	Lodging & Accommodation	33:29
9	Spa Director	Resort	Lodging & Accommodation	54:00
10	President	Cruise Line Designer	Transportation Accommodation	56:00

addition, we attempted to include a group of organizations and informants that were able to provide answers to the interview questions and that were representative of various sectors of the hospitality industry, including hotels, restaurants, cruise lines, private clubs, and spas. Three authors recruited informants and conducted the interviews. Following the principle of purposive sampling, the researchers first attempted to contact organizations that are commonly acknowledged as leaders in well-being practices (Accor, 2019; Avison Young, 2019; Global Wellness Institute, 2019; Horwath, 2018). The ability to recruit more informants for this research was hampered by the massive layoffs and restructuring that occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on the hospitality industry (Oliver, 2020).

Table 1 shows descriptions of the organizations and informants interviewed. The semi-structured interviews utilized an institutional review board (IRB)-approved interview guide and were conducted via video conferencing and recorded for analysis. Altogether, ten (10) interviews were completed between June and September of 2020. The duration of the interviews was from 23 min to 56 min, averaging over 37 min. Interviews were transcribed for analysis, resulting in 108 pages of text.

3.4. Analyzing the data

Two authors who were not interviewers first independently analyzed the data and coded themes that emerged from the data. The empirical data were analyzed using axial coding and interpretation (Patton, 2002). Axial coding was used to establish sub-categories and components of the main higher-level codes such as well-being programs, facilitators and barriers, measures of impact, and possible future states. The method of coding relied on the disaggregation of core themes during the qualitative, interpretive data analysis (Charmaz, 2006). The two researchers compared the themes and differences first with each other and then

iterated the analysis until complete agreement was reached. These themes were subsequently identified as potential THS dimensions and confirmed by literature (more to come on the themes, dimensions, and other findings in the Results section).

Finally, the original interviewers assessed each organization according to the THS dimensions by evaluating both the interview data and publicly available information about the hospitality organization. The original interviewers assessed each organization utilizing the THS dimensions by evaluating a) the interview data, b) relevant information disclosed by the hospitality organization in its official website, c) related news about the organization from mainstream press, and d) industrial reports from credible institutions (e.g., Global Wellness Institute, 2019). This created a triangulation process where results from different information sources were compared to identify similar results (Patton, 2002). The shared findings thereby can more accurately capture the actual THS progress of each organization. This represents an abductive process of interpretation and re-interpretation of empirical data focused on the core conceptual themes in the research problem.

4. Results and discussion

Research Objective #2: Explore how hospitality organizations are responding to and contributing to the well-being trend in their industry.

The following themes, both enablers and barriers for creating THS offerings, were identified in the data:

Enabler #1: The ability to offer THS requires a THS-aligned strategic focus as manifested in terms of organizational structure and culture.

From the insights collected from our informants, it was clear that the presence of a THS-aligned strategic focus, as manifested in terms of organizational structure and culture, can play a vital role in the development of hospitality organizations' THS practices. For some organizations, well-being is culturally ingrained in the organization: "My title is chief wellness officer," and "We have an 'eat well' team instead of food and beverage" (Subject 5). Moreover, some hospitality organizations emphasize THS values and culture when recruiting talents. One informant mentioned that, when it comes to talent recruitment, in relevance with THS practices, the organization prioritizes on organization-personnel-value-fit over domain specific experiences. In the informant's own articulation, such emphasis is manifested in recruiting for individuals who "believe in our message and our culture" so that the entire team "understands that culture from top to bottom and is just keen on executing that experience for everyone." For certain organizations, as THS has been a part of the company's culture from the beginning, THS values and practices are naturally embraced by their team members as not only a part of the organizational culture but as well as personal pursuits. The strong and authentic corporate culture cultivated by the THS-aligned strategic focus deeply impacts THS value propositions and management practices, empowering a systematic wave of THS efforts invested across properties and the headquarter to assure THS-aligned practices.

Enabler #2: The ability to offer THS depends on proactive planning for different stakeholders' well-being.

Employees are an important part of delivering a THS value proposition. Employee well-being is addressed through organizational activities and the value of delivering transformative guest experiences. Some companies focus just on customers' well-being, that is, well-being is a service/feature they provide, but while has not been planned or stressed for the employee aspect. Some companies that have employee well-being deeply embedded into their culture have challenges with profitability in a business that traditionally is not built on holistic well-being. For instance, Subject 8 states that well-being initiatives "always had to have a profit or business case behind it. And if you could not articulate

how an owner or a franchisee could profit from implementation of a strategy, it was more difficult to get leadership to buy in." Some companies change employee well-being programs often, thus demonstrating a lack of long-term commitment to their strategy. While it is true that employee-focused well-being practices decrease stress and improve job satisfaction, companies cut it back when resources fall short. In other words, well-being in practice is treated by hospitality organizations as a supportive add-on, not as a core necessity of the business. To enable THS, hospitality organizations need to understand and design programs for the well-being of different stakeholders.

Enabler #3: Well-being responsibilities should be diffused across members of an organization.

The role with responsibility for developing and managing well-being THS appears to depend on the structure and culture of an organization. An organization with a top-down approach has a specific person or department in charge; an organization with an ingrained culture of well-being has the responsibility diffused across its members. Subject 2 shared this: "We don't have anyone that's, you know [solely responsible], we're all about well-being." It is important to all hospitality organizations that upper management supports well-being and makes it part of their strategy. Interviews indicate that in companies where well-being is deeply rooted into the culture, the owner/upper management has a well-being mindset. A concentrated well-being role appears to create barriers to authentically delivering on well-being initiatives because they come across as instructions rather than part of a reason for being.

Enabler #4: The physical environment (i.e., servicescape) is an important consideration in developing THS.

The physical environment plays a very important part of organizational ability to develop and offer THS. Air quality, physical space, amenities, and other servicescape elements are difficult to change and hard to design – multiple factors determine the guest's/member's experience. When well-being investment in servicescape competes with other initiatives, it is often at a disadvantage with well-being ROI hard to define, measure, and defend. Organizations that design for well-being do not always understand ROI but are attempting to deliver on their mission and promise. Subject 9 shared this: "It's not easy to change the built environment, right? When you're looking at enhancing a hotel where guests stay and you're looking at even something as simple as like renovating your fitness center, there is [an ROI calculation] that's required, right?"

Organizations struggle with how to sell well-being and how to match their offerings to specific market segments with differing needs and wants. This strongly relates to issues with measurement of the results of well-being offerings, as lack of understanding of well-being initiative ROI hinders investment in THS offerings.

Barrier #1: Organization's THS offerings do not match with customers' wants or needs.

The ability to offer and execute well-being offerings requires a strategic view, a long-term commitment, and employee knowledge and expertise. Subject 4 summed it up this way: "We're only five years from inception, so you know, we are still trying to understand who our target customer is." Customers' lack of willingness to pay for or attend well-being activities can be an important barrier. Customer well-being is best defined from a guest point of view; as such, organizations need to put themselves in their guests' position to see what innovative offerings may be valuable. As value is cocreated, understanding what customers want or need from a hospitality service is critical to developing THS offerings that not only engage customers but also hold the power to transform the experiences of customers, employees, communities, and



Fig. 3. Conceptual model of transformative hospitality organizational dimensions.

society (Gallan et al., 2019). Ultimately, in recognizing the value of customer’s perspectives in crafting THS offerings, many of our informants shared that they believe personalized experiences are going to be the key in the future. Everyone’s view of well-being is different. As a result, hospitality organizations will need to become more intimate with their customers to better understand their personal needs when developing THS offerings.

Barrier #2: Well-being and transformative effects are difficult to measure, and metrics are not particularly prevalent in the hospitality industry.

As well-being is not well defined by hospitality organizations, it is hard to measure. Many organizations struggle with understanding the impact of well-being programs on profitability. Most organizations view THS offering impact through traditional measures and metrics. Some rely on customer or employee narratives to provide validation for the difference they make in individuals’ lives. For instance, Subject 5 shares this: “The company was tracking the number of times that people went and they would fill out a questionnaire about how they felt afterwards. They were noticing the trend that they were feeling less stressed. That was number one. Then some of the classes that I was teaching, I got to know some of these ladies, and they were telling me that they were starting to go off certain medications that they were on, so blood pressure medication.” For many companies, measurement is if their offerings (e.g., room, cabin, etc.) sell.

Barrier #3: The COVID-19 pandemic holds the potential to alter the definition of well-being in hospitality industry, emphasizing different components that were not as prominent prior to the pandemic.

A natural hazard like the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to change the emphasis on different aspects of well-being, including but not limited to safety, social well-being, and mental health. It has already created a stronger focus on safety with organizations retuning social density and revising the service process eliminating unnecessary physical service offerings and touchpoints. Responses to COVID-19 will change, but trends that are emerging and have the potential to last include a tighter focus on profitability, customers wanting hedonic experiences again, and a renewed focus on those near and dear.

To summarize, the enablers and barriers support the notion that to become more transformative, hospitality organizations must pay attention to many factors. Consistent with the concepts of the Service Profit Chain (Sasser et al., 1997), hospitality organizations need to have a supportive culture, focus on other stakeholders’ well-being (including employee well-being) in order to facilitate customer well-being, and need to develop metrics and measures to gauge success of well-being offerings. Overall, these themes support our conceptualization of THS, provide important insights into the challenges that exist when hospitality organizations develop THS offerings, and identify organizational characteristics, or dimensions, that support an organization’s journey toward being a fully-formed THS organization, all of which lead us into addressing RQ#2.

Research Objective #3: Develop a framework of THS dimensions that can describe and evaluate the transformative capabilities of hospitality organizations.

Aspects of enablers vs. barriers identified in RO#1 were recognized to be organizational capabilities, termed THS dimensions, that could be used to assess hospitality organizations’ transformative endeavors. Organizational dynamic capabilities are “a set of specific and identifiable processes” related to best practices and routines that support competitive advantage (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000, p. 1105). Firms

Table 2
Assessment of organizations in dataset according to THS dimensions.

Organization	Type of Organization	Customer THS Offerings	Employee THS Offerings	THS Servicescape	Org. Structure	Org. Culture	THS Feedback/Metrics	Total Points	THS Journey Stage
1	Hotel Resort Spa	4	4	4	4	4	4	24	4
2	Convention Center	2	2	1	3	3	3	14	1
3	Restaurant	1	2	1	2	2	2	10	1
4	Cruise Lines	4	3	4	3	3	3	20	3
5	Hotels	4	4	4	4	4	2	22	3
6	Hotels	4	4	4	3	4	2	21	3
7	Private Club	3	1	4	4	3	3	18	2
8	Hotels	3	4	2	3	4	3	19	3
9	Resort	3	2	1	3	3	2	14	1
10	Cruise Line	2	1	1	3	2	2	11	1

attempt to match their dynamic capabilities to their business environment (Teecce & Pisano, 2003). In a hospitality context, this is seen as organizations responding to a trend toward holistic well-being by developing transformative value propositions. To best explore this possibility, we developed a method for assessing each organization, discussed next, followed by the findings.

Two authors identified organizational capabilities, termed THS dimensions, from the major themes that emerged from the qualitative interview data. Since there is no existing literature on transformative organizational capabilities, this method was the only way to accomplish this task. Even if the dimensions, through future empirical research, are shown to be lacking in some elements, they are a first attempt to move the field of TSR forward. The limitation related to the use of one-time qualitative interviews and observations would suggest that findings may be incomplete but not necessarily wrong (Karimi et al., 2017). The organizational dimensions identified through data analysis are shown in Fig. 3. They include customer THS offerings, stakeholder and employee THS offerings, THS servicescape, THS metrics, organizational culture, and organizational structure.

The original interviewees were then asked to assess each organization they interviewed using each of the intervals for the THS organizational dimensions. This allowed the research team to create a table of the

organizations evaluated by the THS dimensions. The range of possible scores is 6 to 24. Our findings demonstrated support for the effect of organizational capabilities on an organization’s transformative efforts (see Table 2). The scores of our sampled organizations ranged from 10 to 24, reflecting potential discrepancies in practice. Analysis of the organizations in our sample showed that hospitality companies can take very different approaches to developing transformative capabilities. Additionally, findings support the realization that becoming a transformative hospitality organization is a journey with no destination – there is no such thing as a perfect end state. Finally, it is evident that our definition of THS is only an aspirational concept that can motivate and guide organizations to keep moving on their THS journey. None of the organizations profiled can be termed Transformative Hospitality Organization – becoming one is more important than actually achieving the status. Our definition and framework of THS should be thought of as a mission statement, one that continues to motivate organizations to do better. These findings further support this THS-dimension framework as being particularly useful.

Research Objective #4: Depict a transformative journey with respective development stages of transformative hospitality organizations as suggested by THS dimensions.

Finally, as a result of the previous assessments, each organization

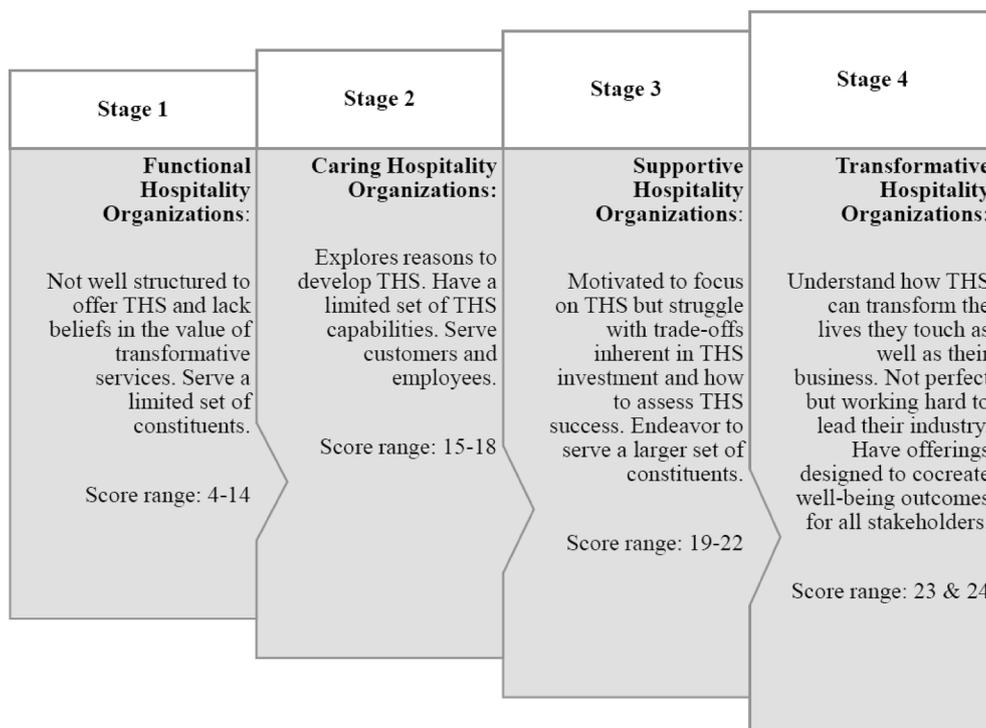


Fig. 4. A conceptual model of stages in a THS journey.

was plotted on a continuum toward offering complete THS offerings as represented by its definition: *services that are offered and delivered by hospitality organizations that are designed to cocreate holistic well-being not only for customers but also for employees, the community, and the environment and society at large*. The entire team of researchers collaborated to assess all organizations in the sample using all the secondary and primary data obtained and described previously. Cut-offs between THS journey stages were based on the range of scores observed and a review of the team's knowledge of each organization's offerings and capabilities.

Becoming a THS organization can be an aspiration for hospitality service providers where each step along the THS journey represents the inclusion of additional entities served, requiring a significant increase of service capabilities. The six organizational dimensions proposed for THS are based on empirical data and can be used by service providers for self-assessment. Descriptive labels, descriptions, and THS dimension point ranges have been applied to the four stages in the THS offering journey (see Fig. 4 for an assessment of hospitality organizations in this sample). Depending on their current position on the THS journey, the upcoming stages can serve as a goal for service providers to be able to create holistic well-being for customers, employees, the community, or society at large. As hospitality organizations develop additional capabilities that allow them to offer more transformative value propositions, they move along the THS continuum. Some of the organizations in our sample showed elements of being functional – they had basic offerings for specific customers or didn't even know their target markets well enough to completely understand their transformative needs. Other organizations have developed caring elements of their business model, looking at their offerings through the eyes of their customers. For instance, some organizations have demonstrated this through offering a more complete well-being value proposition, including room amenities, food and drink options, and social activities. Some organizations have exhibited qualities of supportive organizations, thinking about developing well-being offerings for stakeholders in addition to their customers. These companies still struggle with identifying the proper metrics for assessing THS success and are in some ways handcuffed by traditional measures of ROI. Finally, some organizations have developed capabilities that support transformative elements, including recognizing their impact on the environment and society. Although our sample is small, it nonetheless represented a variety of organizations in their THS journey.

The fulfillment of this research objective creates the opportunity for hospitality organizations to better understand where they are in their journey to becoming more transformative. Since well-being trends continue to proliferate in this industry, hospitality organizations cannot simply offer add-on well-being services and expect to compete effectively. They need to comprehensively understand the capabilities they will need to develop in order to move along in their THS journey.

5. Conclusions

This research has contributed to hospitality and services literature in several important ways. It has developed a definition of Transformative Hospitality Services (THS) that integrates concepts from the hospitality literature and industry, well-being models, and TSR concepts. This research has also identified THS dimensions that hospitality organizations will require to advance in their THS journey. Finally, we have identified enablers and barriers that need to be evaluated by hospitality organizations as they journey toward becoming a transformative hospitality organization.

In our view, the journey of transformation for transformative hospitality organizations does not have an end state. Rather, the practice of THS will continue to evolve as conditioned by larger organizational/industrial externalities, expanding beyond the practical scope postulated by our framework. With such well-being-kindled momentum, hospitality organizations will continue to self-transform while positively transforming the individuals, communities and society that surround

their being. The framework to assess organizations according to THS dimensions offers both theoretical and practical contributions.

5.1. Theoretical & managerial implications

First, this framework contributes to TSR by introducing and defining a novel concept – Transformative Hospitality Service (THS). This advances academic research by providing a specific conceptualization of what TSR indicate in hospitality. From this foundation, this research was able to further develop transformative organizational dimensions, which were supported by literature on dynamic capabilities. In addition, this contribution furthers TSR through the advancement of understanding how service organizations can transform various elements in a service ecosystem. Moreover, we supplement the TSR literature by investigating the feasibility of THS in a variety of hospitality sectors, where customers are increasingly demanding the transformative potential of services. This research should provide scholars a basis on which to explore other service industries and customer contexts in order to identify how organizations can develop transformative offerings for their customers.

Second, this framework allows hospitality organizations to perform self-assessments to better understand opportunities to become more transformative in their effects. While the well-being literature in general demands more empirical investigations into practical guidance, the current study adds to understanding well-being by offering a systematic self-assessment tool and roadmap toward simultaneously achieving multi-level well-being. The journey map provides structure to better understand what capabilities need to be developed for a hospitality organization towards fully offering THS. This work also contributes to the well-being practices in hospitality by identifying the unparalleled significance for a hospitality organization to simultaneously assess and improve well-being offerings at various levels (i.e., micro-, meso-, and macro-), for multiple stakeholders (e.g., customers, employees, communities, and societies/environments), and both subjectively (in the eyes of recipients) and objectively (in the actual deliveries).

Findings from this research provide practitioners with direct insights into the development of hospitality organizations' THS capabilities. Revealing a noticeable gap between individual level vs. higher levels of well-being practices, our research points out the importance for hospitality organizations to align their cross-level well-being commitment to further expand their transformative potential. Such findings bring to prominence the value of a multi-stakeholder, service ecosystem approach to design organization systems that enable the co-creation of transformative hospitality services. In order to grow into a true transformative hospitality organization, companies should actively build processes and mechanisms that openly invite multiple groups of individuals such as customers, employees, community members as well as other beneficiaries of various prosocial causes to cocreate toward shared well-being. Throughout this process, cross-organizational coalition efforts will naturally emerge towards a well-being-driven community, with hospitality organizations being the center of the transformative momentum. For instance, restaurants and hotels may form partnership with nearby gyms, clinics and childcare centers, to provide employees with healthcare and childcare welfare (Severson, 2020), naturally bonding organizations who share similar transformative cultures to work together towards societal well-being.

With our findings revealing that well-being practices are hard to track and measure, more managerial attention should be devoted to developing strategy-aligned definitions and metrics for well-being-associated ROI. Well-being is a vastly evolving field of practice with new technology and innovation continuously emerging, which, inevitably, is associated with heavy investment. It is thereby necessary for hospitality organizations to carefully assess the usage rate or return on investment of many high-tech equipped devices. From an organizational growth perspective, such practices will shed light on a more sustainable trajectory for hospitality organizations to evolve along a transformative

journey with minimal detriment on efficiency. Pursuing transformative growth via a clearly defined strategy and strategy-aligned dimensions can also provide clear guidance regarding allocation of critical resources.

5.2. Limitations & future research

The findings of this research are restricted due to a relatively small sample. As a result, the sample dictated the THS Journey stages. A larger sample of firms analyzed using a quantitative methodology could refine these stages for a larger set of hospitality organizations. Future research can develop a THS scale from a larger sample of hospitality firms. The journey map, and the THS dimensions that dictate the stages, may be altered and/or expanded based on additional research. Additionally, our cross-case qualitative method was designed to build theory in the TSR domain. Consequently, a longitudinal research design could shed additional light on how hospitality organizations evolve over time. As a result of our study, some research questions that emerge include:

- How generalizable are the THS journey stages?
- What type of hospitality organizations benefit from adapting a THS approach?
- What company-specific factors moderate the adoption of a THS approach?
- What factors in the competitive environment moderate a firm’s adoption of a THS approach?
- How can the THS journey stages be used to guide service development?
- How do THS journey stages evolve over time? Are there typical sequences?
- What THS value propositions appeal to specific stakeholders (customers/employees/managers/investors)?
- How do THS value propositions offered to specific stakeholders contribute to value cocreation in a service ecosystem?
- Under what conditions could THS journey stages be transferable to service sectors outside the hospitality sector?

Finally, future research opportunities include utilizing additional case-based and quantitative approaches to better understand how organizations need to be designed to better meet the changing demands of customer and other stakeholder well-being in transformative service.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. A review of well-being practices in the hospitality industry

A review of well-being practices in the hospitality industry was conducted (see Appendix Table A1). Altogether, the review of contemporary well-being practices in the hospitality industry echoes the growing prominence of well-being as a shared area of interest for both scholars and practitioners (Horwath, 2018; Meyer, 2019; Nagy, 2018). Addressing individual-level well-being dimensions, many hospitality organizations are assuming an approach to developing service offerings that contribute to guests’ and employees’ physical, mental, social, and

Table A1
Exemplars of Hospitality Organizations’ THS Practices.

Well-being Levels		Well-being Dimensions*	Exemplars of Practice
Individual Level	Customers	Physical Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Athlete-inspired, high-tech training centers & facilities (e.g., Pullman London St. Pancras Hotel) – Cutting-edge, high-tech beauty services to provide skin/body treatment (e.g., SO hotels & resorts) – In-room facilities, designs and technologies that promote wellness, healthiness, and vitality (e.g., Swissotel’s Vitality Rooms) – Healthy food & beverage options (e.g., Singapore Airlines) – Total health/wellness experiences (e.g., Blue World Voyage’s active lifestyle cruising)
		Mental Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Emotional retreat/anxiety management programs (e.g., Fairmont Quasar Istanbul) – Bespoke peaceful rooms designed to relax and de-stress (e.g., Raffles Hotel) – Digital detox programs (e.g., Air France) – Relaxing physical evidence (e.g., American Airlines’ relaxing screen visuals)
		Social Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Family travel packages dedicated to better serve families with kids and to enhance family bonding (e.g., Westin’s Family Package) – Spaces designed for breastfeeding women to better bond with children and to better support one another (e.g., Mamava airport Pod Suites) – Travel with purpose programs/volunteer tourism to connect individuals with local communities (e.g., Airbnb’s Sabbaticals initiative) – Engaging customers to contribute toward social causes (e.g., Marriott, United Airlines, Comedor restaurant)
Employees	Physical Well-being	Occupational/Educational Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Immersive travel experiences to learn about local cultural heritage (e.g., Airbnb Sabbaticals initiative) – Educational vacations (e.g., Road Scholar, Smithsonian Sleepovers) – Workspaces designed for business travel (e.g., Fairmont Quasar Istanbul) – Mindfulness programs created for business travelers to enhance efficiency and productivity (e.g., Fairmont Quasar Istanbul)
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Support for medical and health care/counseling services (e.g., Katie Button’s restaurant) – Financial incentives to encourage employees to be attentive to their physical

(continued on next page)

Table A1 (continued)

Well-being Levels	Well-being Dimensions*	Exemplars of Practice
		health (e.g., Katie Button's restaurant)
	Mental Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Gym membership, group fitness classes and running routines (e.g., Comedor restaurant, Katie Button's restaurant) – Emotional management resources and toolkits (e.g., IHG Hotels, Chefs with Issues) – Support employee engagement in spiritual wellness such as medication classes (e.g., Indigo Road Hospitality Group)
	Social Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Group workout sessions for team building (e.g., Comedor restaurant) – Childcare credits/services (e.g., West-bourne restaurant) – Volunteering/community service opportunities (e.g., Disney VoluntEars Program) – Engaging employees to contribute (financially) towards a social cause (e.g., Marriott)
	Occupational/Educational Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Education investment programs to help employees pursue higher education and intellectual stimulation (e.g., Chick-Fill-A, Disney, Starbucks) – A shared-value approach to practice internal marketing and to build positive and engaging professional environment (e.g., Southwest Airlines) – Processes to facilitate occupational reflections and sense-making for fulfillment (e.g., Marriott's Heart of the House Stories project) – Personalized management coaching (e.g., Dig food group)
Community Level	Economic Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Help feed those in need in the local communities (e.g., Chipotle's Do Good with Burritos initiative) – Help rebuild the communities hit by natural disaster (e.g., Disney Cruise Line) – Supplier diversity programs to support local, small and medium-sized, women and minority-owned businesses (e.g., Hilton)
	Youth & Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Supports the intellectual growth and development of the children in the local community (e.g., Carnival Foundation's "Hello Philippines, Hello Future!" initiative) – Support fundraising processes for local schools and youth sports teams for physical wellness (e.g., Chipotle's Do Good with Burritos initiative) – Experiential learning programs that offer hands on experiences and career

Table A1 (continued)

Well-being Levels	Well-being Dimensions*	Exemplars of Practice
	Social Cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – coaching to develop college students' hospitality career and entrepreneurship (e.g., Saxbys coffee's experiential learning program) – Employee volunteer services to provides emotional comfort for the sick children staying at local hospitals (e.g., Disney's voluntEARS project) – Donate resources to support for local community's social-serving commitment (e.g., Four Seasons New York City donate hotel rooms for front-line health workers during COVID-19) – Community restaurants and coffeeshops that provide programs and spaces to facilitate community social cohesion (e.g., the Community Restaurant, NYC)
	Cultural Appreciation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Travel-with-purpose programs that engage community members to showcase local cultural heritage (e.g., Airbnb's Sabbaticals Initiative)
Societal and Environmental Level	Inclusiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Promote undermined groups' occupational opportunities (e.g., Hilton partners with MAKERS to accelerate women's equality) – Committed to tackle discrimination against undermined social groups (e.g., IHG supports United Nations Free & Equal campaign)
	Social Cause Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Supports research and heighten public awareness of critical social issues (e.g., Caesars Foundation) – Prosocial giving to health causes (e.g., American Airlines donate to hunger-eliminating efforts)
	Youth & Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Youth inspiration programs focused on inspiring high school or more junior groups of students/children (e.g., Universal Orlando Resort) – Open source materials and other knowledge sharing processes to help students at large to develop professional skills and presentations (e.g., Ritz Carlton's Open Source center)
	Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Commit resources and efforts to limit/revert negative environment impact (e.g., Chipotle's environment sustainability initiatives) – Global stewardship and cooperation to manage common environmental problems across geographic regions (e.g., Marriott International's Serve 360 program)

* Well-being levels were sourced from Fig. 2, which represents a comprehensive review of well-being conceptualizations from a variety of disciplines.

occupational/intellectual well-being. For instance, Qantas Airlines collaborates with the Perkins Research Center to develop a total passenger well-being program that is comprised of four pillars: cardio-metabolic health, sleep, immune functions, and cognition and mood (Garfinkel, 2019). Airbnb's Sabbatical Initiatives offer travelers the opportunity to engage in travel-with-purpose programs to connect with local communities while learning about local cultural heritage (Airbnb, 2020). Although there has been a clear focus on guest well-being, hospitality organizations are also developing offerings that address employee well-being. A notable example is Marriott's TakeCare initiative, which is committed to associates' total well-being and happiness by elevating associates' state of mind, body, and spirit through sessions such as financial planning, fitness events and challenges, career development, and community-serving opportunities (Marriott International, 2016).

Beyond individual-level well-being, hospitality organizations also devote efforts to enhance community-level well-being. Such practices may be targeted toward uplifting or restoring the community's overall economic well-being. For example, Disney Cruise Line made commitment to provide cash and in-kind support to help rebuild the communities hit by Hurricane Dorian in Bahamas ports (The Walt Disney Company, 2020). In addition, hospitality organizations are actively engaged in contributing towards local communities' youth development. The Carnival Foundation, funded by the Carnival cruise line corporation, developed the "Hello Philippines, Hello Future!" program to support the personal growth and development of the children in their cruise line's port/destination community (Carnival Corporation, 2020). Moreover, hospitality organizations offer programs, spaces, resources, and services to contribute to social cohesion. During the COVID-19 breakout, Four Seasons New York City donated hotel rooms to support frontline health workers as part of a joint coalition to fight the virus (Hotel Business, 2020).

Stemming from community-level efforts, some hospitality organizations support societal-level well-being. In support of societal inclusiveness, hospitality organizations such as Hilton and IHG support leading social campaigns to promote underserved groups' occupational opportunities and social status (Hilton, 2019; IHG, 2019). To propel the advancement of various prosocial causes, hospitality organizations are actively engaged in supporting research, public campaign, and the elevation of critical social issues. For example, the Caesars Group-owned and operated Caesars Foundation supports research programs that aim to help older individuals live longer, healthier, and more fulfilling lives (Caesars Foundation, 2019). In addition, hospitality organizations are devoted to efforts in youth development at a larger, societal scale (Caesars Foundation, 2019). Ritz Carlton, for instance, developed open source materials and other knowledge-sharing processes to help students develop professional skills and presentations (The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, 2020). Chipotle's environment sustainability initiatives commit resources and efforts to limit and revert negative environment impact (Chipotle, 2019). Marriott International's Serve 360 program practices global stewardship and cooperation to manage common environmental problems across geographic regions (Marriott International, 2019).

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