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Subject:

The Issues Most Frequently Complained About by Hotel Staff in 2025

An analytical assessment based on personal field notes (qualitative observational study)



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Note: This text is based on anonymized observation notes I kept in the field throughout 2025 and on employee feedback. No facility/brand name has been provided; individuals and events have been anonymized.

Abstract

This article thematically classifies the most frequently expressed complaint topics of hotel operations staff in 2025, based on field observations. The findings concentrate on wage/fringe benefit equity, shift and overtime management, manager-employee communication, workload and staff shortages, psychological safety (including perceptions of mobbing), guest-induced emotional exhaustion, and lack of trust in HR processes. Within the theoretical framework, the root causes of complaints are interpreted using the Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R), organizational justice, psychological contract, and emotional labor approaches. In the conclusion section, actionable quick wins and structural improvement recommendations are presented from a general manager's perspective.

Keywords: Tourism, Employee Experience, Employee Complaints, Hotel Management

Important Note:

The writings included in the BaghirovLab article are presented as an analytical evaluation based on the authors' experiences and personal field notes.



1. Field Observation

1.1. Context

Throughout 2025, I worked in close contact with different departments (front office, F&B, housekeeping, security, technical services, sales/reservations, and HR intersection) in a mid-to-large scale hotel operation in Türkiye (with operational dynamics similar to a city hotel/resort hybrid). During this period, I observed employee complaints primarily through the following channels:

- Daily operational conversations (back office, staff areas)
- Shift handovers and departmental briefings
- Individual feedback submitted to HR / exit interview notes
- Spontaneous feedback in the staff cafeteria and during accommodation/shuttle processes
- Feedback on decisions reflected to the field during management meetings

1.2. Method (qualitative classification)

This study is not a statistical survey; it follows a “field notes + thematic analysis” approach. Throughout 2025, I grouped recurring complaint statements under thematic categories. While forming the themes, I used two criteria:

1. Frequency: The same complaint being repeated by different individuals/teams
2. Severity/impact: The complaint leading to intention to quit, absenteeism, performance decline, or conflict

Therefore, the expression “most frequent complaint” represents not an absolute count, but rather the issues that resonate most in the operation and drive behavioral change.

2) Findings (Most frequent and most impactful complaint categories in 2025)

The themes below were the most recurrent in the field and had the greatest operational impact.

Theme 1 – Wage, benefits, and perception of “fairness”

Core of the complaint: “It’s not little; it’s unfair.”

- Perceived wage differences among employees doing the same job
- Lack of clarity in bonus criteria (who receives it, and based on what?)
- Overtime either not being recorded or being paid late
- Imbalances in fringe benefits across departments (shuttle service, meals, staff housing quality)



Typical field statement (anonymized):

"I work, but the return isn't the same. In the same shift, someone gets less tired but earns the same wage."

Theme 2 – Shift planning, overtime, and leave management

Core of the complaint: "I can't plan my life."

- Last-minute shift changes
- Days off being shifted, leave being fragmented
- Continuous overtime during high season and insufficient rest
- Perception that shift fairness varies by individual

Operational impact: Increase in absenteeism, higher risk of workplace accidents, fluctuations in service quality.

Theme 3 – Staff shortages and workload (JD-R breakdown)

Core of the complaint: "The number of people cannot carry the weight of the job."

- Room count/standard time pressure in housekeeping
- Stress of keeping up with service speed in F&B
- Simultaneous check-ins, complaints, phone, and email workload at the front office
- Heavy reactive maintenance workload in the technical team

The critical aspect of this theme: People are not rebelling against "being busy," but against the constant normalization of that intensity.

Theme 4 – Manager communication and visibility

Core of the complaint: "There's no one who listens to us; only results are demanded."

- Defensive attitude when feedback is given
- Fear of being labeled a "complainer" when issues are escalated upward
- Low recognition, high criticism
- Management only appearing on the floor when there is a problem

My field observation: Good managers manage the "work," while strong managers manage the "emotion." In 2025, the problem emerged more on the second side.

*Theme 5 – Psychological safety, respect, and perception of mobbing*

Core complaint: "If I make a mistake, I'll be crushed."

- Harsh tone, scolding in front of everyone
- Comparison and humiliation (especially during peak hours)
- Frequent use of the word mobbing (even if it does not always have a legal basis, the perception is strong)

Operational impact: Decrease in innovation suggestions, concealment of mistakes, closure of internal communication channels.

Theme 6 – Trust in HR processes: recruitment promises, orientation, and career

Core complaint: "What is promised is different from reality."

- Mismatch between the role/working hours described during recruitment and the actual operation
- Orientation remaining superficial
- Unclear promotion criteria (who advances and how?)
- Performance evaluations being perceived as a "formality"

Psychological contract breach: This theme has become one of the topics that most rapidly increases the intention to resign.

Theme 7 – Guest behavior and emotional exhaustion

Core of the complaint: "Everything is for the guest; but what about us?"

- Staff being left alone in the face of rude/boundary-crossing guest behavior
- The uncontrolled application of the interpretation "The guest is always right"
- Staff being made the scapegoat in complaint management

Field note: A guest being difficult is not a problem in itself; the problem is the absence of a clear management standard that stands behind the staff.

Theme 8 – Working conditions: cafeteria, shuttle service, staff housing, equipment

Core complaint: "The standard provided to us is low."

- Staff meal quality/variety and schedule incompatibility
- Overcrowding of staff shuttles, route/schedule issues
- Hygiene, density, and privacy problems in staff housing
- Lack of equipment (radio, chemicals, gloves, POS, tablet, etc.)

This theme is not "luxury"; it is a direct indicator of productivity and dignity.



3) Commentary (Root causes and reinforcing cycles)

In 2025, I clearly saw this: Complaints do not operate individually; they function as a chain.

- Staff shortage → overtime → burnout → error → guest complaint → managerial pressure → psychological insecurity → resignation → staff shortage increases even more.

This is a classic “operational death spiral.”

Theoretically, when JD-R (demands increase while resources do not) and organizational justice (procedural/distributive justice is weak) deteriorate simultaneously, employees do not say “the hotel is difficult”; they say “the hotel is not fair and does not protect me.” That statement marks the point where emotional detachment begins.

From a general manager’s perspective, the most critical distinction is this:

Reducing complaints does not mean “silencing conversations”; it means improving the system. Because complaints from the field are often not ill intent, but an early warning signal of a KPI.

4) Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1. Conclusion

In 2025, the common denominator of the issues most frequently complained about by hotel staff is the trio of fairness + predictability + respect. Although wages may appear to be a standalone topic, the real breaking point is the feeling of “not being treated equally under the same conditions.” Shift/leave scheduling, managerial communication, and the perception of being left alone in front of guests rapidly escalate complaints.

4.2. Actionable recommendations (GM + HR together)

A) Quick wins with visible impact within 30 days

1. Shift policy declaration: Clarify last-minute change rules, day-off rights, and overtime recording standards.
2. Supervisor/manager communication standard: No reprimands in front of others; feedback 1:1.
3. Guest boundary protocol: Clear protective statements for staff and an escalation line (who to call).
4. Staff meal/service micro-improvements: Quickly restores the perception of “field respectability.”



B) Structural adjustments within 90-180 days

1. Justice audit: Review wages/bonuses + shift distribution + leave practices on a departmental basis.
2. Recruitment promise-reality alignment: Align the language of job postings/offer letters with on-site realities.
3. Redesign of orientation: Task shadowing, mentor assignment, and checklist during the first 14 days.
4. Management development program: Develop leaders who manage people, not just operations (especially mid-level managers).

4.3. Closing note

This study is not a “right/wrong” debate; it is a map of the fragile points on the human side of hotel operations. 2025 showed me this: Guest experience is an outcome; employee experience is the production line of that outcome.



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