Guest house supervisors' meaning cognition and its influence on job satisfaction in the context of Mombasa County, Kenya

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Abstract

The alignment between an employee's work role and his/her beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviours (meaning) are critical human resource issues in guest house operations. This is because, compared to classified hotels, guest houses have a larger percentage of untrained personnel. For those with hospitality training, they are usually recruited as supervisors. This notwithstanding, the owners of guest houses tend to dictate and control almost all the operations, thus lowering employee empowerment; a major source of job satisfaction. This study sought to determine the influence of meaning, a dimension of psychological empowerment, on job satisfaction of guest house supervisors. A descriptive survey study design, focusing on the seventy-six registered guest houses in Mombasa County was used. The study utilized census, where all the supervisors in all the registered guest houses in Mombasa County were included. Primary data was collected through a semi-structured questionnaire. Pre-testing was done in three guest houses and the remaining seventy-three were included in the study. Data was analysed by means, percentages and standard deviations. Pearson correlation coefficient and linear regression were used to establish the relationship between the study variables. Findings revealed that there existed a positive and significant influence ($p < 0.05$) of meaning on job satisfaction ($r = 0.765$). This study could well be of critical importance to guest house entrepreneurs and managers who would be able to formulate and implement empowerment strategies for their supervisors and other staff. In addition, it will be helpful to organizations such as the Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Federation of Kenyan Employers, the Kenya Association of Hotelkeepers and Caterers and Pubs Entertainment and Restaurant Association of Kenya, in sensitizing their various members on the importance of aligning employee's work roles to their beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviours.

Keywords: Meaning, Psychological Empowerment, Job Satisfaction, Supervisors, Guesthouse

Introduction

Job satisfaction is one of the most researched areas in the field of organizational behaviour (Snipes, Oswald, LaTour & Armenakis, 2005). Yang (2008) studied the Taiwanese hotel industry on the effects of newcomer socialization on job satisfaction. He revealed that job satisfaction is a powerful method of taming high labour turnover and reinforcing organizational commitment, and is closely associated with employee empowerment. Additionally, Elbeyi, Yüksel & Yalçn (2011) researched on how job satisfaction was affected by employee empowerment in Turkey. They posited that due to the uniqueness of the hotel industry, and further the close interaction between employees and customers, employee job satisfaction has also been closely associated to quality service and customer satisfaction. Further, Kim, Lee, Murrmann & George (2011) did a study on motivational effects of empowerment on employees' organizational commitment in upscale restaurants in South Korea. Their study revealed a significant and positive relationship between empowerment and employee job satisfaction. This was further concretized by Ponton (2010) in his analysis of psychological empowerment and job satisfaction of middle-level managers in the hospitality industry in Australia. Job satisfaction is the feeling workers have about their work roles. It not only includes the perceptions they develop towards the various aspects of their work activities, but also the mental insight that impacts on their extent of alignment with institutions (Ivancevich & Matteson, 2009; Rothman & Coetzer, 2010). Buitenbach & Hlalele, (2005) in their study on petrochemical engineers' psychological empowerment and job satisfaction in South Africa posited that employees would be satisfied and loyal to their organizations if they perceive that they are empowered therein. From a purely profit driven perspective, statistics suggest that contented employees are 31% more productive and three times more creative than unhappy employees. They also have led to a 12% increase in a hotel's profitability. Hotels that have a positive engagement culture with employees of diverse backgrounds experience 24% less turnover (*Siteminder*, n.d.).

'Meaning' is one of the four important psychological empowerment states. It is the employees' connection to their work; ideals and standards seen in the light of the employee's value of the work goal or its purpose (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). In their study on psychological empowerment and job satisfaction of petrochemical engineers in South Africa, Buitenbach and Hlalele, (2005) posits that it includes the match between employees' job and their personal goals such as job motivation, intrinsic caring for the work roles, and other external factors which affect an employee's cognition about how they feel, which in turn might affect employee job satisfaction. In addition, Ponton (2010) found that if employees perceive the work roles assigned as important, then these tasks become meaningful to them. If the tasks are perceived as less important, then the tasks become meaningless. He revealed that there exists a positive correlation between the tenet of 'meaning' and psychological empowerment.

The relevance of meaningful work tasks for employees' job satisfaction has been captured in many studies (Buitendach & Hlalele, 2005; Gachunga, Maina & Kabare, 2016; Hancer & George, 2009; Hsiang-Fei, Sheng-Hshiung & Ya-Yun, 2014; Koen, & Maaike van, 2011; Mohsen, 2014; Nassar, 2017; and Ponton, 2011). Most of the study findings confirm that employees who perceived their jobs as significant and worthwhile felt higher levels of job satisfaction than employees who saw their jobs as having little value to them. Though Most of these studies were carried out in hospitality sector, Buitendach and Hlalele, (2005) and Gachunga, Maina and Kabare, (2016)'s studies were carried out among engineers in a petrochemical industry in South Africa and the civil service in Kenya respectively. This

strengthens the fact that meaning is a major determinant of job satisfaction irrespective of the sector one works in. Further, Hsiang-Fei, Sheng-Hshiung and Ya-Yun, (2014) in their study on empowering employees, job standardization and innovative behavior of frontline staff of tourist hotels in Taiwan posited that psychologically empowered employees are more confident in their work resulting in the display of a higher degree of satisfaction in their work and in better service provision. Additionally, Hancer and George, (2003) in their study on non-supervisory employees' chain restaurant staff psychological empowerment in Midwest United States and Ponton, (2011) aver that experienced employees are likely to be more intrinsically motivated than the less experienced employees by work that is freely entered into depending on the meaning they attach to it and benefits thereof derived. However, all these studies were carried out in large establishments and classified hospitality establishments such as chain hotels and restaurants (Aksu & Aktas, 2010; Klidas & van den Berg, 2013; Elbeyi, Yüksel & Yalçn, 2011) with clearly set management systems and none in small hospitality institutions such as guest houses.

Guest houses are an important component of the hospitality industry that directly contribute to development of the local economy. According to Ramukumba and Ferreira (2016), the majority of the guest houses (64.2%) use locally produced products while providing opportunities for employment for the local community. However, compared to classified hotels, guest houses have a larger percentage of untrained personnel. For employees with hospitality training, they are usually recruited as supervisors. As such, the owners of guest houses tend to dictate and control almost all the operations, thus lowering employee empowerment, a major source of job satisfaction. This then creates a complicated case of guesthouse supervisors who are not fully empowered to discharge their work roles, subsequently leading to high staff turnover. The current study therefore sought to determine whether there exited a relationship between the meaning cognition and job satisfaction among guest house supervisors in the county of Mombasa, Kenya.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design in order to provide a deep insight into the psychological empowerment concept, capturing guest house supervisors' attitudes and patterns of behaviour with regard to the tenet of meaning of psychological empowerment and job satisfaction. This study was carried out in Mombasa, a county located at the coastal strip of Kenya, lying on the shores of the Indian Ocean ($4^0$03'S $39^0$40'E / 4.050^0S 39.667^0E). At the time of this study, there were a total of seventy-six (76) guest houses registered with the Mombasa County Government, with a total of 233 supervisors who were in-charge of various operations in their respective establishments. The study utilized a census where all the 76 guest houses in Mombasa County were included in the study. A self-administered semi-structured questionnaire was utilized in collection of the data. The research instrument was pre-tested in three guest houses obtained from the total population. This assisted in assessing clarity, ease of use of the instruments and timeliness of data collection (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999).

Meaning, a dimension of psychological empowerment was measured using a 3-item scale developed by Spreitzer (1995a) and as used successfully by among others, Ponton (2010). On the other hand, job satisfaction was measured using the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) short form as designed by Weiss, Dawis, England and Lofquist (1967) and reviewed by Lo and Aryee (2003). To establish the influence of the independent variable, that is, the cognition of meaning of psychological empowerment on job satisfaction (dependent variable), a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. In addition, a linear regression model was done to

ascertain the level of significance the independent variable (meaning) had on the dependent variable (job satisfaction). A regression model was utilized in testing the research hypothesis. To concretize regression, ANOVA was done to establish whether the regression model significantly predicted the outcome.

Findings

The meaning cognition statements were analyzed using descriptive statistics as shown in Table 1.1. Majority of the respondents (n=119, 56.6%) agreed that the work they did was meaningful to them, as also shown by a mean score of 3.7 and standard deviation of 0.692. However, (n=91, 43.3%) of the respondents disagreed that the work they did was meaningful. The findings also indicated that majority of the respondents (n=147, 70%) felt that the work they did was very important to them while (n=63, 30%) disagreed that the work they did was important to them. A mean of 3.67 and standard deviation of 0.909 was in support of this. Further, majority of the respondents (n=140, 66.7%) indicated that their job activities were personally meaningful to them while 33.4% disagreed that the work they did was meaningful to them. A mean score of 3.63 and standard deviation of 0.914 was in support of this. Overall, 'meaning' had an above average mean score of 3.66.

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Mean	SD
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%		
The work I do is meaningful			91	43.3			91	43.3	28	13.3	3.70	.692
The work I do is very important to me	14	6.7	49	23.3			126	60.0	21	10.0	3.67	.909
My job activities are personally meaningful to me	14	6.7	56	26.7			119	56.7	21	10.0	3.63	.914
Overall											**3.66**	**.766**

Table 1.1: Descriptive Statistics of 'Meaning' Cognition of Psychological Empowerment

These findings indicated that the meaning cognition was rated fairly high by the respondents. This implied that employees of guest houses felt the work they did was meaningful to them and was significant not only to the organization but to them as well.

To establish job satisfaction, the MSQ questionnaire items were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The mean value for job satisfaction was found to be 3.52 within a scale of 1 to 5; with a standard deviation of 0.479. This implied that guest house supervisors' job satisfaction was just above average; hence, a lot of efforts were needed to achieve total job satisfaction. However, these results did not show the linear relationship between meaning cognition and job satisfaction of guest house supervisors. As such, a Pearson moment-correlation was used to establish the relationship between the meaning dimension of psychological empowerment and job satisfaction of guest house supervisors as shown on Table 1.2. A positive relationship between the meaning dimension of psychological empowerment and job satisfaction of guest house supervisors ($r = .765$, $n = 210$, $p<.05$) was established. This indicated that there was a

strong linear relationship between 'meaning' and job satisfaction of guest house supervisors. Thus the more the tenet of 'meaning' of psychological empowerment was implemented the higher the job satisfaction of guest house supervisors.

		Satisfaction	Meaning
Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Meaning	Pearson Correlation	.765**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
 b. Listwise N=210

Table 1.2: Correlation between 'Meaning' Cognition of Psychological Empowerment and Job Satisfaction

The results of the current study concur with a study by Yang (2008) in Taiwan hotels. He argued that employees who perceived their jobs to be significant and worthwhile also feel higher levels of job satisfaction than employees who see their jobs as having little value. It further agreed with Ponton (2010) in his study analysing hotel managers in Australia; who found that there was a positive relationship between the sub variable of 'meaning' and job satisfaction. Additionally, the current study agreed with Hsiang-Fei, Sheng-Hshiung and Ya-Yun (2014) in their study about empowering hospitality employees in Taiwan who posited that employees who felt that they were meaningfully empowered displayed more confidence in their work; resulting in feeling of a higher degree of satisfaction in their jobs. The results further agree with studies done in other sectors of the economy. Buitendach and Hlalele (2005) in their study among South African engineers found a correlation between the meaning cognition of psychological empowerment and job satisfaction, same to Gachunga, Maina and Kabare (2016) in their study on the influence of psychological empowerment on organizational commitment among Kenyan civil servants. Therefore, this study reveals that the tenet of 'meaning' is an important construct of psychological empowerment and had considerable influence towards guest house supervisors' job satisfaction in Mombasa County, Kenya.

A linear regression model was used to predict job satisfaction of guest house supervisors in the study as summarized in Table 1.3. R^2 represented the measure of variability in job satisfaction of guest house supervisors. From the model, (R^2 = .585), meaning as a predictor accounted for 58.5% variation in job satisfaction of guest house supervisors. The change statistics was used to test whether the change in adjusted R^2 was significant using the F-ratio. The model caused the adjusted R^2 to change from zero to .585 and this change gave rise to an F- ratio of 293.299, which was significant at a probability of .05.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted-R Square	Std.Error-of-the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R-Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig.-F Change
1	.765a	.585	.583	.27449	.585	293.299	1	208	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Meaning

Table 1.3: Model Summary of 'Meaning' Cognition of Psychological Empowerment

Further, ANOVA was used to test whether the regression model was significantly fitting in predicting the outcome than using the mean as shown on Table 1.4. The regression model significantly improved the ability of the 'meaning' dimension to predict job satisfaction of guest

house supervisors. The F- ratio was 293.299 and significant (P<.05) implying that the model was significant.

As such the null hypothesis that there was no significant relationship between the 'meaning' dimension of psychological empowerment and job satisfaction of guest house supervisors in Mombasa County was rejected; and the alternative that there was a significant relationship between the 'meaning' dimension of psychological empowerment and job satisfaction was adopted.

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	22.098	1	22.098	293.299	.000[b]
	Residual	15.671	208	.075		
	Total	37.769	209			

a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction
b. Predictors: (Constant), Meaning

Table 1.4: ANOVA of 'Meaning' Cognition of Psychological Empowerment

In addition, the β coefficients for independent variable 'meaning' psychological empowerment was generated from the model and subjected to a *t*-test, in order to test the hypothesis under study. The *t*-test was used as to establish whether the predictor was making a significant contribution to the model. Table 1.5 shows the estimates of β-value and gives contribution of the 'meaning' tenet of psychological empowerment predictor to the model.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	*t*	Sig.	Correlations		
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part
1	(Constant)	2.060	.093		22.110	.000			
	Meaning	.435	.025	.765	17.126	.000	.765	.765	.765

a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

Table 1.5: Coefficients of 'Meaning' Cognition of Psychological Empowerment

The β-value for 'meaning' had positive coefficient, depicting a positive relationship with job satisfaction of guest house supervisors as summarized in the model as:

$$Y = 2.060 + .453X + \varepsilon$$

Where: Y = job satisfaction, X = e- meaning psychological empowerment, ε = error term

From the findings the *t*-test associated with β-values was significant and the 'meaning' cognition of psychological empowerment predictor made a significant contribution to the model. The coefficients results showed that the predicted parameter in relation to the independent factor was significant ($\beta_1 = 0.453$, P<0.05). This implied that the null hypothesis, which stated that there was no significant relationship between the 'meaning' dimension of psychological empowerment and job satisfaction of guest house supervisors, was rejected. The results indicated that for each unit increase in the 'meaning' dimension of

psychological empowerment, there was 0.453 units increase in job satisfaction of guest house supervisors. This implied that the more meaning the supervisors attached to their jobs the higher the satisfaction.

The findings of this study concurred with Ponton (2010) in his study of hotels in Australia, who posited a positive correlation between job satisfaction and the tenet of 'meaning'. In addition, the current study results agreed with Hancer and George (2003) in their study on psychological empowerment of non-supervisory employees working in full-service chain restaurants in Midwest United States. The findings of their study revealed that the construct of 'meaning' does have a significant and strong influence on the employees' overall job satisfaction. This research revealed that when guest house supervisors find the work they perform to be consistent with their beliefs, attitudes and behavior they tend to be happier and contented with their jobs. This could be used by guest houses as a human resource strategy in curbing staff turnover, which has been pointed out to be a major problem in the larger hospitality industry (Hospitality Guild, 2013; National Restaurants Association, 2015; Kuria, Wanderi & Ondigi , 2011).

Conclusions

In conclusion, the critical importance of meaningful work tasks for employees' job satisfaction has been captured in many studies (Buitendach & Hlalele, 2005; Gachunga, Maina & Kabare, 2016; Hancer & George, 2009; Hsiang-Fei, Sheng-Hshiung & Ya-Yun, 2014; Dewettinck & van Ameijde, 2011; Mohsen, 2014; Nassar, 2017; and Ponton, 2011). However, most of these studies were done in classified hospitality institutions and other sectors of the economy. Most researchers tend to shun the lower cadre hospitality institutions like guest houses. Therefore, this study was very important in highlighting the importance of the meaning cognition and its contribution to job satisfaction of guest house supervisors. The results showed a significant influence of 'meaning' on job satisfaction which if implemented by guest house owners would ultimately lead to decreased staff turnover in their institutions.

The study recommends the adoption of management activities that would enhance guest house supervisors' perceptions of the fit between their jobs and their values, attitudes and beliefs and serve to make them more efficient in what they do. This would include aspects such as enhancing training, presentation and proper communication systems. Guest house supervisors need to understand the philosophies, missions, visions and values of their respective organizations. This can be done through internal workshops and seminars in the guest houses. This would in turn improve their feeling of 'meaning' and subsequently job satisfaction resulting in enhanced service quality provision. Further, this study revealed clearly the critical role played by the meaning cognition of psychological empowerment towards job satisfaction. The study, therefore recommends that the various organizations under the Ministry of Tourism such as KTB, KAHCC and PERAK should come up with policies and guidelines on how 'meaning' empowerment in their sectors could be implemented effectively. KTB, KAHCC and PERAK should hold seminars and workshops for managers and sensitize their memberships on the critical role played by the tenet of 'meaning' towards employee job satisfaction.

This study utilized questionnaires as the method of data collection. Considering the drawbacks of questionnaires of being prone to dishonest responses, the difference of understanding and interpretation of what is required, and the possibility of respondents skipping some questions which might be critical to the study, future researchers could utilize other data collection

methods such as focus groups and interviews. This might be useful in obtaining detailed information about personal and group feelings, opinions and perceptions which would be critical in concretizing the findings of this study.

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