
HOSPITALITY CLIMATE AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR

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ABSTRACT: *Demand is on the increase for encouraging strategic human resource practices that are value-added in terms of enhancing competitive ability of organizations. The hospitality sector which has recently witnessed increased level of participation with new entrants and customer patronage is faced with heightened competition, therefore requires exploring and understanding workplace practices that are likely to influence desired outcomes. The study used a structured survey instrument named Hospitality Climate and Competitiveness Survey (HOCACS) to generate data from the sampled four star hotels in the South-South and South-West geopolitical zones. The analyzed data showed some findings thus: encouraging competency is a potent means of staying competitive as employees have the requisite skills to undertake strategic and real tasks; empowering employees and rewarding were also found to have link with competitiveness and clear communication of task and work goals were necessary practices to remain competitive. The study concluded that hospitality climate is required in the face of heightened competitiveness in the hospitality sector and recommended that managers should encourage a friendly work climate and guarantee cross-functional relationship and work member cooperation and commitment.*

KEYWORDS: Hospitality, employee empowerment, employee rewards, competency, communication.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary work organizations have witnessed a sustained attention on strategic approaches for coping with the increasing level of competitiveness resulting from technological revolution and globalization. Aper and Landi (2006) has shown extensively that in this renewed effort aimed at initiating strategic perspectives for optimal performance, much is required in shapening organizational practices especially by managers in evolving an organizational climate that support relational practices. Appreciating this link as a premise for employee commitment has been stressed by Gulbyz (2010). While theorizing on a more integrative approach to managing today's organization, Apiye (2010) is of the view that encouraging all constituents of organization through flexible practices which are themselves goal directed will not only facilitate goal attainment but sustain competitive potency of firms in a complex environment.

Ordinarily, a hospitable work climate that reminisce friendliness and flexibility can be contradictory to conventional task oriented practices that managers believes are more goal focused.

Managers may be more inclined to more mechanistic means of ensuring all member compliance to tasks and targets which are likely to sustain short-term commitment on the part of employees with the likelihood of diminishing the organizational capacity to achieve long term goals. The repositioning of the nations economy through the attraction of foreign investors has primarily heightened participation and competitiveness in the hospitality sector with much demand for quality service delivery. It is common knowledge that attainment of this goal rest on employee as a strategic resource that needs to be effectively and efficiently managed not just through wage/salary incentives but expectedly through a work climate that guarantee necessary skills and competencies and ensuring clear communication of vision and goals. This thinking is however intuitive, Osmond and Caleb (2005) argued that such a hospitable work place climate is required in labour intensive firms which we think the hospitality sector belongs. This study therefore is an attempt at empirically ascertaining the link between hospitality climate and competitiveness in the Nigerian hospitality sector.

Justification of the Study

Saluby et al (2007) found that aligning human resource practices of managers with strategic targets of organizations is a first line approach at enhancing performance. This simply means that whatever strategies and policies are crafted to attain work goals they should be synergistically conducted to ensure conducive work climate for employees who are themselves strategic. It is not uncommon to find employees in the sector experience absenteeism and high turnover (Ibang, 2009) due to managerial practices that are not stimulating therefore the need to examine this relationship. Growing the Nigerian economy has been largely anchored on attracting foreigners who rely heavily on the services of the hospitality sector. A holistic analysis of all the variables that will strengthen and position it for quality service delivery that meet customers demand must be underscored. This is considered alongside the changing operational technologies of the sector that has provoked new ways of work and altering work processes which requires acquisition of new skills and improving on existing ones that are relevant for competitiveness. This study also recognized the dare need to shift the analytical level in climate studies from the micro level to macro were its influence on organisational outcome can be empirically showcased.

Objectives of the Study

The general purpose of the study is to examine the influence of hospitality climate on organizational competitiveness. Specifically, the objectives aimed are as follows:

- a. To find the extent to which encouraging competency relates with organizational competitiveness in the hospitality sector.
- b. To determine the extent to which employee empowerment relates with organizational competitiveness in the hospitality sector.
- c. To know the extent to which employee rewards relates with organizational competitiveness.
- d. To ascertain the extent to which open communication relates with organizational competitiveness in the hospitality sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hospitality Climate

An avalanche of works have been carried out by organizational behaviour scholars who have shown interest in understanding employees' perspectives of their work environment and how these affects their attitude and behaviours towards work goals. Indeed, there exist early studies that have suggested that a theoretical link exists between the social climate of work and the extent of employee satisfaction and willingness to show commitment to work tasks. This in turn was predicted to have association with overall productivity (Likert, 1997); Kahn and Biulan, 2004; Ndaye and Ellen, 2005; Egori and Matiu, 2010). The concept of climate of work has been extensively discussed as that which captures and describes contextual actions as that likely sharpen behavior of those that operates or undertake tasks within the context (Dennison, 2006; Ostroff, Kimcki & Tankins, 2007). It reflects both formal and informal practices, procedures and policies in the organization (Schneider, 2008). According to Lanre (2009) the climate of work typifies the complex expression of different level behaviours of organization actors that determines their psychological consensus and attachment to their context of work. This simply means that the complex experiences prescribes outcome which can be positive or negative to desired organizational goals. Whitley (2002) emphasized the importance of shared perception as underpinning the concept of climate. The essence of his position is that it represents commonalities of work while his position is seemingly lucid; there exist conceptual variance relating to analytical levels of climate which some scholars have left at the level of individual perception rather than organizational (Omral, 2007; White, 2009; Bille, 2009). In same vein, this thinking has also provoked the multi nomenclatures that are ascribed to the concept of climate in work organization which includes psychological, organizational, hospitality, social and relational. While the different nomenclatures do not diminish the essence of shared practices and complex expression, White, (2009) had analytically placed the psychological, relational and social climate at the level of individual and connote the nature of interrelationship and fraternities that exist among work members. On the other hand, the author had argued and placed organization and hospitality climate as organization wide shared expressions and practices that are linked to desired outcomes. The major concern here about the climate is its capacity to influence work place outcomes whether at the individual level or organizational level. Infact, Ostroff, (2007) has noted that a number of studies have consistently demonstrated relationship between the climate of work and individual outcomes of job satisfaction, commitment, involvement and accidents. The study of emergent processes suggests that a work group's shared perception might influence individual's attitudes above individual perception of the work environment. An interesting aspect of the climate discourse is that taken by Palufe and Conrad (2010). The authors had shifted from the ordinary mention of share practices to showing the fact that the hospitality climate is a multi dimensional concept that showcases different expression and behaviours at work, the level of practice notwithstanding. They are a bunch of managerial and lower employee practices that denotes the climate. Schwarb and Larry (1990), Benla, (2007) argued that the set of characteristics that describes the climate includes empowerment, career enrichment, intellectual capital enrichment, communication, relationships, ships, job design, compensation, rewards, constant relationship and many other practices. An aggregate of these practices that represents the hospitality climate are likely to influence bulk of outcomes in work organizations. As noted else where, it is an enduring climate that triggers behavior at the individual level of work and channels organizational

outcome in return. Importantly, much of the literature in relation to climate and its influence on work place outcome are majorly linked to employee while this position has been sustained, its capacity to influence macro level outcome has had a peripheral attention therefore in this instance, it is aimed at theorizing at the level of the influence of hospitality climate and organizational competitiveness which is essentially macro level implications.

Organizational Competitiveness

The concept of competitiveness has been defined variously by different scholars with most of them taking sides with their professional philosophies. The strategic management and economic literature dominates the discourse so far. All the same, our effort here is not aimed at diagnosing or assessing the conceptual potency of the varying contributions rather we candidly believe that they have all offered the premise for in-depth understanding of the concept especially when viewed in the light of their ability to create domains for understanding. At the macro economic level, competitiveness has been described in relation to price: (Ekine, 2003). Fagerberg (1996) viewed competitiveness in terms of technological capability differences. Though Nelson (1992) is of the strong view that markets are sufficiently competitive and efficient therefore may not necessarily be technologically contained to the extent that it affects their competitive capacity.

Wignaraja, (2003) has espoused on competitiveness from a macroeconomic perspective. He argued that competitiveness is the firm's ability to compete to increase their profits and grow. However this can only be attained with improved capacity to mobilize all form of resources (technology, human, finance etc) for quality products and work processes. Infact quality processes as a primary component of competitiveness is also noted in Lall (2011). The author had however noted that analyzing competitiveness at the micro and macro economic perspective will not be sufficient as competition among corporations is different from national level which is the crux of their analysis.

Dandy (2009) defined competitiveness as how effectively an organization meets the wants and needs of customers relative to others that offer similar goods and services. Dandy had further argued that the extent to which a firm musters the capacity to put human, technological, operational and structural resources together prepares the organization for competitiveness. When firm deliberately ensure motivational practices through structural flexibility that empower employees to think for the organization while at same time sharing knowledge they are apparently adopting a competitive strategy that make them compete favourably (Dana, 2009). Folorunsho (2010) in his discourse of the raging degree of competition among ICT (computer infrastructures and software) firms believed that building technological competence is vital for competitiveness but managerial capacity to transmit the common goal through open communicational practices is also vital for competitiveness. Through this work processes and strategies are crafted to facilitate attainment of goals desired. Billa (2007) strongly noted that competitive capacity of firms can be enhanced if managers institute work climate through their practices that do not only give support to acquiring operational infrastructure but also ensures that employee acquire competencies that guarantee their ability to participate and at same time are sufficiently aware of the organization direction of actions. This implies that competitive ability of organization is a function of providing work climate which employees should perceptibly see as being friendly and encouraging to attract

commitment. The point of anchor here is that the competitive capacity of the firm is likely to result from the degree of hospitality practices which we have examined therefore we hypothesize thus:

H₀₁: Encouraging competency does not relate with organizational competitiveness in the hospitality sector.

H₀₂: Employee empowerment does not relate with organizational competitiveness in the hospitality sector.

H₀₃: Employee rewards does not relate with organizational competitiveness.

H₀₄: Open communication does not relate with organizational competitiveness in the hospitality sector.

Area of Study

The study is conducted in the South-South and South-West geopolitical zones of Nigeria. Particularly, Porthacourt, Warri, Lagos, Benin, Akure, Yenagoa, Uyo and Calabar were the main cities with the hotel types that were used for the study. The choice of these cities was due to increased level of economic activities especially Portharcourt which is the hub of oil activities and Lagos the major commercial city in sub-regional Africa (Ejerua, 2009). The hotels that are considered in these cities are those classified as four star which from the Hotel Owners and Operators Association Schedule are more in terms of size of workforce and number operated.

METHODOLOGY

A positivist philosophy has been adopted in carrying out this study. What this means is that a quantitative approach is required to analyse the aprior-ri hypothesized statements which serves the basis for theory building. The study used a marked population in terms of classification earlier stated from the hotelier's association schedule for four star hotels. We had distributed 1144 survey to 109 hotels operating in 8 cosmopolitan cities in South-South and South-West in Nigeria. To avoid any one city or hotel skewing the results, between 8-15 in each city were chosen with no one of them having more than 15 respondents. Eligibility is considered for the sample was, for managers and employees alike, you would have worked in the hotel for at least 8 months consistently for the low/medium level employees who have high statistic of turnover rate in the sector (Mukaila, 2009). It is believed that this period is sufficient to have both perceptive and real understanding of the work climate and objectively reflect on it. The survey for the South-West respondents were electronically mailed to 4 appointed research coordinators and 1 survey monitoring consultant. They printed out the survey and distributed accordingly among participants. The exercise lasted for 2 months and 3 weeks including weekends since most of the hotels had shift operation. The consistent follow-up by e-mails and phone calls yielded high response rate. 752 of the survey instrument were returned and used for the study.

Measurement

A seeming intellectual debate exist relating to the actual means of measuring organizational climate since most of the existing works according to Teepeci and Barthlett (2001) had used cultural dimensions which they considered as conceptually variant. However Tino and Ryder (2001) have created a theoretical in-road for the purpose of measuring organizational climate through their Tourism and Hospitality Organizational Climate Survey (THCS) which have been used in four and five star hotels in Australia; this has been used in the developing economy context by Melano (2007) and Abaye (2010) and were validated with a coefficient alpha of 0.91.

We have considered the components of hospitality climate examined in this study which includes encouraging competency, empowerment, rewards and open communication.

For **encouraging competency**, 5 items were used to measure it. These were adopted from the scale earlier mentioned having selected a subset of the original scale that best suit this context and with the highest factor loading on the original scale for instance a sample item was “I am encouraged and sponsored to attend specialized training programmes often” the reliability alpha for encouraging competency was 0.72.

Empowerment was measured with 6 items from Abaye (2011) 13 item scale. Again the six items were carefully selected based on their factor loadings that were high on the original scale. A sample item from the scale on empowerment is, “I am allowed to take decision tasks that best suit our customers when needed”, the reliability alpha was 0.77 for this scale and adjusted good for the study.

Reward was measured adapting 5 items from Melano (2007) which we mentioned earlier. Essentially, this is selected in line with the context investigated and having considered their high factor loading from the original scale. A sample item from the scale is, “I am promptly rewarded for my ability to exceed assigned targets”, the reliability alpha for this was 0.81.

Open communication, we have measured this component using 4 items drawn from Melano (2007) scale. These were also considered for their high factor loading from the original scale. The sample item was, “I am always told clearly what the hotel wants to achieve through the new work procedures”. The hotel wants to achieve through the new work procedures”. The reliability alpha was 0.74 which was considered good in line with Nunnally (1978) threshold alpha of 0.7.

For organizational competitiveness, the study adapted the 8 items measurement scale of Cornell (2009). The scale has also been validated and used in the work of Melford (2010) with an alpha value of 0.76.

All of these were measured on a five point Likert scale type which ranges from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree 1.

RESULTS

Means, Standard Deviation and Alpha Co-Efficient for the Examined Dimensions of HC and Competitiveness

Dimensions	Mean	Std	N	Cronbach α
Encouraging competency	4.302	0.592	109	0.72
Empowerment	3.753	0.634	109	0.89
Rewards	4.159	0.617	109	0.77
Open communication	4.339	0.577	109	0.92
Competitiveness	4.326	0.583	109	0.76

Table 1 shows descriptive statistical outcome on the different dimension of the predictor variable and competitiveness. It also shows the reliability alpha for each of the constructs examined. The mean values based on the measurement scale applicable presents the extent of hospitality climate practices in the organizations investigated. The reliability coefficients also within the alpha threshold Nunnally (1978) applicable, the instrument is reliable therefore served the study purpose.

Correlation Matrix showing relationship link hospitality climate and competitiveness

		Encouraging competency	Empowerment	Rewards	Open Communication	Competitiveness
Encouraging Competency	Pearson Correlation	1	.482**	.412**	.774**	.511**
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
Empowerment	Pearson Correlation	.182**	1	.532**	.361**	.634*
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
Rewards	Pearson Correlation	.412**	.532**	1	.614**	.761**
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
Open Communication	Pearson Correlation	.774**	.361**	.614**	1	.825**
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
Competitiveness	Pearson Correlation	.511**	.634*	.761*	.825**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	

** correlation significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* correlation significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The Pearson correlation outcome showing the relationship between the examined variables is presented in table 3a above. The result shows positive significant relationship between the dimensions of hospitality climate (encouraging competency, empowerment, reward and open communication) and the measure of competitiveness. At $P < 0.01$ the coefficient values 0.511, 0.825 for the encouraging competency and open communication respectively are significant and for $P < 0.05$ the coefficient values 0.634, 0.1761 for reward and empowerment respectively are significant. The regression results further explains the relationship between the variables.

Regression Results

Model		R		R ²	Std Error of Estimate	
		.676		.457	2.448	
		Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t	Sig
Beta	Std Error	Beta				
1	Constant	12.307	3.023		4.071	0.000
	1. Encouraging Competency	.582	.168	.482	3.766	0.001
	2. Empowerment	-.318	.084	.253	2.651	0.000
	3. Reward	.456	.137	.320	3.325	0.001
	4. Open Communication	.009	1.341	.431	3.462	0.000

Dependent Variable: Competitiveness

The regression results in table 3 are indicative of the relationship between the examined variables in this study. The multiple dimension of hospitality climate examined were each regressed against the criterion variable (growth) first hospitality climate has a strong positive and significant relationship with competitiveness in the sector. The $R = 0.676$ show the nature of the relationship

and up to 45.7% of the criterion variable competitiveness is explained by the predictor (hospitality climate) variable. This obviously shows a strong link. Again considering the magnitude of the different components of the predictor on the criterion variable, encouraging competency with $P = 0.482$ and open communication with $P = 0.461$ have much of the weight in influencing competitiveness.

DISCUSSION

This research examined the role of hospitality climate on organizational competitiveness. First the findings here have expanded knowledge frontiers in relation to some work place practices that strategically enhance the organization effort at mobilizing and utilizing resources effectively for optimal performance. Indeed the results of the study have given empirical support to the work of Adenike (2011) whose study predicted a relationship between work climate and employee job satisfaction. Although there is conceptual variance in relation to the author's path of study, there is a common point of thought as reflected in his climate of organization. Again the study analytical level chosen for this study is essentially macro therefore, the findings substantiate the outcome of Grant (2009) who had examined organizational climate and performance of organizations. The results of the hypothesis were upheld strongly. This suggests that encouraging competency amongst employees underscore managerial attempt at having a competitive workforce. In his work, strategic renewal of innovative firms, Sotonye (2006) had argued extensively that employee competencies are primary to the sustenance of the entire renewal package. Activating their skills and competencies is a competitive force required to survive. Lemy and Mera (2009) have also espoused on the need to rely on employee competencies as key success factors in renewal or entrepreneurial actions of organizations. They are considered strategic and inimitable in Boma's (2011) study on intellectual capital. All of these emphasized the empirical support of our study for what extant literature presents so far.

Further, the literature on empowerment for employees and performance both at micro and macro level of analysis is interestingly rich (Conger & Kanungo; 2006; Amabile & Khair, 2008). Empowerment as a component of hospitality climate as examined in this study share common conceptual and theoretical posture with what extant literature presents. Zanzi (2007) reported that empowering the work force is as important as attempt at repositioning firms for competitiveness. Through such, they are able to think through tasks and innovates processes and actions that facilitate goal attainment. The structural rigidities that are often characteristic of mechanistic work environment obviously do not confer the much needed empowerment that is necessary for competitiveness (Ibilo, 2005; Yole, 2008; Alabor & Ruore, 2009). Sacramento (2007) observed that much of the employees in the manufacturing sector where he conducted his study on employee empowerment and job satisfaction, underscored empowerment as an important component of the work environment that it is in itself motivational therefore a requisite for optimal functioning. Our study findings corroborates this position empirically by showing a relationship with competitive capacity of hotels in the hospitality sector. However, our study results contrast with that of Benala (2010) that showed inverse relationship between hospitality climate and organizational innovativeness. The reason is not far fetched. The author in his context had examined hospitality as a mono-construct which our study has operationalized as a multidimensional construct.

Essentially, the import of our position is premised on a conceptual link between innovativeness and competitiveness of firms.

CONCLUSIONS/POLICY IMPLICATION

In this study, we have examined the influence of hospitality climate on organizational competitiveness in the hospitality sector of the economy. There is renewed effort aimed at growing the tourism and hospitality sector of the economy and has therefore stimulated participation which also require that a hospitality climate be created to engender a committed work force that serve both operational and administrative purposes effectively and efficiently. The study operationalized the hospitality climate construct with such dimensions as encouraging competency, empowerment, reward, and open communication. From data generated and analyzed, it was shown that a relationship exist between hospitality climate represented by encouraging competency, empowerment, reward, and open communication and the competitive ability of organizations in the hospitality sector. The results no doubt has brought to the fore the link between evolving a work place climate that reinforce competence renewal awareness among managers and subordinates, encourage organizational effort at communicating objectives, reward hardwork and empowering employees and strategic organizational effort at competitiveness. What has been highlighted from the study is that hospitality climate is required by firms to attract all the strategic resources that are needed to compete and attain organizational goals. This outcome essentially underscores the need for capacity building in relation to a work climate that is characteristically feminine Hofstede (1990) thereby encouraging friendliness amongst all work members. Governmental effort at ensuring a functional private sector that will help in revamping the economy should encourage sectoral reforms that permit hospitality approach to governance at work.

LIMITATION AND FURTHER STUDIES

The study has its major limitation on the sector focus. Our study has essentially had its participants mainly from the private sub-sector who are also major players in the sector. The non involvement of the public sub-sector makes it difficult for generalization of result since the operational and administrative climate of the sub-sectors are at variance. Based on this, we strongly draw attention to future research effort on the public subsector whose operations and work climate are often driven by formalized statutory. It will also be important that the study be replicated in other mainstream sub-sector like the telecommunication and manufacturing which are also strategic to the entire economic reform programme.

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