

## Competence Cognition and Its Influence on Supervisors' Job Satisfaction: A Perspective of Guest Houses in Mombasa County, Kenya

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### Abstract

Competence is the extent to which an employee can perform work activities skilfully and with the required knowledge. Competence is critical for guest house supervisors. This is because, compared to classified hotels, guest houses, which command a greater patronage, have a larger percentage of untrained personnel. For staff with hospitality training, they at best, serve as supervisors. This study sought to determine the influence of competence, 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 utilized. The study adopted census, where all the supervisors in all the registered guest houses in Mombasa County were included in the research. Primary data was collected through a semi-structured questionnaire. 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 competence on job satisfaction ( $r = 0.554$ ). Other than guest house owners and managers, this study will be helpful to organizations under the Ministry of Tourism in sensitizing their members on the importance of the supervisors' competence tenet of psychological empowerment in discharging their work roles.

**Keywords:** Competence, Psychological Empowerment, Job Satisfaction, Guest houses, Supervisors

### 1. Introduction

Just like hotels, guest houses are an important component of the hospitality industry. This is because, other than contributing directly to development of the local economy they offer between 60 and 80% of accommodation spaces in most destinations. According to Ramukumba and Ferreira (2016), 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, most of the guest houses have a larger percentage of untrained personnel. For employees with a hospitality training, they are at best recruited as supervisors, the owners of guest houses retaining the role of controlling almost all the operations. This then introduces a risk to employees' competence.

The 'competence' tenet of psychological empowerment determines whether an employee can succeed in the performance of a given work role (Spreitzer & Mishra, 2002). It is the extent to which an employee can do his/her work roles with the required skills and knowledge (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). It refers to the ability of employees to execute their work roles with the required level of knowledge and skills (Spreitzer, 2008). Buitenbach and Hlalele (2005) in their study on psychological empowerment and job satisfaction of South African petrochemical engineers argued that the knowledge and the skills that employees possess have a significant contribution to 'competence'. In support, Hsiang-Fei, Luoh, Tsaor and Tang (2014) posit that employees usually feel competent when they have the confidence about their capability of executing their job responsibilities well. Koen and Maaiké van (2011) in their research on the mediating role of psychological empowerment on the link between leadership empowerment behaviour.

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Employee attitudes and behavioural intentions of frontline service employees in Belgium hotels indicated that workers who have the perception that they are competent, and have confidence that they will succeed in their daily work tasks are happier and satisfied with their jobs than employees who fear that they might fail.

Further, Ponton (2010) in his study on psychological empowerment, job satisfaction and organizational commitment of middle-level managers in the hospitality industry in Australia posited that the more experienced employees seemed to be more confident and competent in their jobs. He argued that the more competent the employees felt, the more satisfied they were with their jobs. Hancer and George (2003) in their study on psychological empowerment of non-supervisory employees working in full-service chain restaurants in Midwest United States too found out that competence was rated higher by the elder and experienced hospitality employees. They further found that this had a direct relationship with employees' satisfaction with their jobs. Further Bhatnagar (2007) in his study on measuring psychological empowerment and organizational commitment in a sample of 607 managers drawn from various organizations in India posited that employees who have had longer tenure in the hospitality industry are better adapted to the work environment and this can lead to feelings of competence and more likely to the feelings of satisfaction.

Moreover, Tsai, Cheng and Chang (2013) in their analysis of the drivers of hospitality industry employees' job satisfaction in Taiwan observed that employees' perceived that their competence empowerment was high. This correlated with the high levels of job satisfaction advanced by the researchers in their sample of these Taiwanese hotels. This meant that the employees had very good training background and excellent skills to perform their work roles, which positively affected their job satisfaction. Patah, Radzi, Abdullah, Adzmy, Zain and Derani (2009) in their study of Kuala Lumpur 5 star hotel receptionists posited that the tenet of 'competence' of psychological empowerment does have a significant influence on the overall job satisfaction. This meant that receptionists who had a higher level of competence experienced a higher level of job satisfaction. Nassar (2017) in his study of psychological empowerment and organizational change among hotel employees in Egypt surveyed 386 employees in chain hotels. He posited that employees who had the required skills of performing their work tasks had high levels of job satisfaction. However, Dehkordi, Kamrani, Ardestani and Abdolmanafi (2011) in their study on the correlation between psychological empowerment and job satisfaction, interestingly found that the cognition of competence had no relationship with job satisfaction. This meant that the perception of having the required skills to do the work had no relationship with job satisfaction.

Further in other sectors of the economy, Buitendach and Hlalele (2005) in their study of South Africa engineers found a positive correlation of medium effect between the cognition of competence and job satisfaction. This implied that the two variables were related, that is, those engineers who perceived that they had the required knowledge and skills to perform their jobs had high level of job satisfaction. In addition, Gachunga, Maina and Kabare (2016) in their study on the influence of psychological empowerment on organizational commitment in Kenyan civil service found that the dimension of competence was positively correlated to job satisfaction of civil servants, which in turn lead to organizational commitment.

The reviewed studies demonstrated some contradicting findings on how the 'competence' cognition of psychological empowerment was related to job satisfaction in the larger hospitality industry in other parts of the world and other sectors of the economy. Furthermore, most of the studies done in the past have concentrated in the classified hospitality institutions and other areas of the economy. The current study sought to determine whether competence cognition had an influence on guest house supervisors' job satisfaction in the county of Mombasa, Kenya.

## **2. Methodology**

This research utilised a descriptive survey research design using two main variables; the competence tenet of psychological empowerment and job satisfaction. The independent variable was 'competence' while the dependent variable was job satisfaction. The research was done in Mombasa County which is located at the coastal strip of Kenya. The County lies on the shores of the Indian Ocean located on the South Eastern part of Kenya (4°03'S 39°40'E / 4.050°S 39.667°E). Mombasa County has a total area of 294.7 km<sup>2</sup> and a total population of 939,370 persons. It is the smallest county in Kenya, covering an area of 229.7 km<sup>2</sup> excluding 65 km<sup>2</sup> of water mass. The target population for the research was supervisors in all the guest houses in county of Mombasa. At the time of the research, there were a total of seventy-six (76) guest houses registered with the Mombasa County Government. These guest houses had a total of 233 supervisors who were in-charge of various operations in their respective establishments.

The research utilised a self-administered semi-structured questionnaire. The research adopted the 3-items of ‘competence’ from Spreitzer’s Psychological Empowerment (PE) scale, and Herzberg’s Job Satisfaction (JS) Scale. The two scales have been tested in the past and found to be reliable. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means and percentages were done for all the objectives. Before performing the inferential statistics, the variables under this study were validated through factor analysis. Two factor analysis tests were done, that is, KMO and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity. To establish the influence of the independent variable, that is, the competence cognition of psychological empowerment on job satisfaction (dependent variable), Pearson correlation analysis was done. In addition, a linear regression model was computed to determine the level of significance the independent variable had on the dependent variable. A regression model was used to test the study hypothesis. To concretize the regression, ANOVA was done to establish whether the regression model was significantly predicting the outcome.

**3. Findings**

The ‘competence’ dimension of psychological empowerment statements were computed using descriptive statistics as summarized in Table 1.1. All the respondents (100%) agreed that they were self-assured about their capability to perform their work. A mean of 4.27 and standard deviation of 0.443 was in support of this. Majority of the respondents (n=203, 96.6%) indicated that they were confident about their ability to do their job as supported by a mean score of 4.20 and standard deviation of 0.477, with only 3.3% (n=7) of them disagreeing. Most of the respondents (n=168, 80%) also agreed that they had mastered the skills necessary for their job while 10% were neutral and another 10% disagreed that they had mastered skills of doing their jobs. A mean score of 3.87 and standard deviation of 1.027 was in support of this.

**Table 1.1: Descriptive Statistics of ‘Competence’ Cognition of Psychological Empowerment**

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Mean	SD
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%		
I am confident about my ability to do my job					7	3.3	154	73.3	49	23.3	4.20	.477
I am self-assured about my capability to perform my work							154	73.3	56	26.7	4.27	.443
I have mastered the skills necessary for my job	14	6.7	7	3.3	21	10.0	119	56.7	49	23.3	3.87	1.027
<b>Overall mean</b>											<b>4.11</b>	<b>.541</b>

The competence items indicated that the supervisors were confident about their ability to do their jobs, having mastered the important skills for their work roles and were also self-assured about their performance capabilities. They were certain that their jobs were well within the scope of their abilities. This was consistent with the high mean value of 4.11. This implied that supervisors of guest houses felt that they were competent enough to do their jobs and had confidence that they can perform their work well.

To establish the descriptive statistics job satisfaction, the MSQ questionnaire items analyzed. The job satisfaction mean value was found to be 3.52 on a scale of 1 to 5; with a standard deviation of 0.479. The implication of this finding was that guest house supervisors’ job satisfaction was just above average; thus, a lot of efforts were needed to achieve total job satisfaction. These results, however, did not reveal the relationship between the study variables. Hence, Pearson Moment correlation was done to determine the relationship between ‘competence’ and job satisfaction as shown on Table 1.2. There was found to be a positive influence of the ‘competence’ tenet of psychological empowerment on job satisfaction ( $r = .554, p < 0.05$ ).

This denoted that there was a moderate linear relationship between the cognition of competence and job satisfaction of guest house supervisors in Mombasa County. Nevertheless, this implied that the more ‘competence’ was improved the more job satisfaction of supervisors of guest houses improved.

**Table 1.2: Correlations of ‘Competence’ on Job Satisfaction**

		Job satisfaction	Competence
Job satisfaction	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	1	
Competence	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.554** .000	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

b. Listwise N=210

Generally, the findings indicated that ‘competence’ positively influenced job satisfaction. This finding concurred with Koen & Maaiké van (2011) in their research on psychological empowerment and behavioural intentions of frontline staff in Belgium hotels, who indicated that employees who have confidence and feel competent in their work roles were happier with their jobs and hence more satisfied than employees who feared that they might fail. It further agreed with Ponton (2011) in his study on psychological empowerment and job satisfaction in the Australian hospitality industry, who posited that the more competent the employees felt, the more satisfied they were in their jobs. In addition, Tsai, Cheng and Chang (2013) in their analysis of the drivers of hospitality industry employees’ job satisfaction in Taiwan observed that employees’ perceived that their competency empowerment was very high. This correlated with the high levels of job satisfaction reported in these Taiwanese hotels. The results of this study further was in agreement with various studies done in the African continent across various sectors which found a positive relationship between the dimension of competence of psychological empowerment and job satisfaction of employees (Nassar, 2017; Buitendach & Hlalele, 2005; Gachunga, et al. 2016).

Buitendach & Hlalele (2005) in their South African study on psychological empowerment and job satisfaction of engineers revealed that the tenet of competence was positively related to job satisfaction. They further explained that those engineers who perceived that they had high levels of skills and knowledge of discharging their work roles displayed high levels of job satisfaction. Moreover, Gachunga, et al. (2016) in their study on the influence of psychological empowerment on organizational commitment in Kenyan civil service found that the dimension of competence was positively correlated to job satisfaction, which in turn lead to organizational commitment. Most studies have actually found that the competence tenet of psychological empowerment has a significant influence on employee job satisfaction (Patah , Radzi, Abdullah, Adzmy, Zain & Derani, 2009; Bhatnagar, 2007; Hancer & George, 2003; Hsiang-Fei, et al., 2014). However, it is important to point out that the findings of the current study disagreed with Dehkordi et al. (2011) in their study on the correlation between psychological empowerment and job satisfaction who argued that the competence tenet had no relationship with job satisfaction of employees. The current study actually revealed a positive linear relationship between competence and job satisfaction of guest house supervisors in Mombasa County.

To find out whether there was a significant influence of the ‘competence’ dimension of psychological empowerment on job satisfaction of guest house supervisors in Mombasa County, a linear regression model was used. The ‘competence’ cognition was used to predict job satisfaction of guest house supervisors as summarized in Table 1.3. The R<sup>2</sup> represented the measure of variability in job satisfaction of guest house supervisors that ‘competence’ psychological empowerment accounted for. From the model, (R<sup>2</sup> = .307) showed that the predictor accounted for 30.7% variation in job satisfaction of guest house supervisors. The predictor used in the model captured the variation in the job satisfaction of guest house supervisors. The change statistics was used to test whether the change in adjusted R<sup>2</sup> was significant using the F-ratio. The model caused adjusted R<sup>2</sup> to change from zero to .307 and this change gave rise to an F- ratio of 92.07, which was significant at a probability of .05.

**Table 1.3: Model Summary of ‘Competence’ Psychological Empowerment**

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	.554 <sup>a</sup>	.307	.304	.35478	.307	92.072	1	208	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Competence

Further, ANOVA was used to test whether the regression model was significantly fitting in predicting the outcome as shown in Table 1.4. The regression model significantly improved the ability of the dimension of 'competence' to predict job satisfaction of guest house supervisors. The F- ratio was 92.07 ( $P < .05$ ) and thus the model was significant. As such the null hypothesis that there was no significant relationship between the 'competence' cognition 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 'competence' cognition of psychological empowerment and job satisfaction was adopted.

**Table 1.4: ANOVA of 'Competence' Psychological Empowerment**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	11.589	1	11.589	92.072	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	26.180	208	.126		
Total		37.769	209			

a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), Competence

In addition, the  $\beta$  coefficient for the independent variable 'competence' was generated from the model and subjected to a t-test, in order to test the hypothesis under study. The t-test was used to measure whether the predictor was making a significant contribution to the model. Table 1.5 shows the estimates of  $\beta$ -value and the contribution of 'competence' predictor to the model.

**Table 1.5: Coefficients of 'Competence' Psychological Empowerment**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations		
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part order
1	(Constant)	1.371	.236		5.814	.000			
	Competence	.559	.058	.554	9.595	.000	.554	.554	.554

a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

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

$$Y = 1.371 + .559X + e$$

Where: Y = job satisfaction, X = e- 'competence' psychological empowerment, e = error term

From these findings the t-test associated with  $\beta$ -values was significant thus the 'competence' cognition of psychological empowerment predictor was making a significant contribution to the model. The coefficient results showed that the predicted parameter in relation to the independent factor was significant ( $\beta_1 = 0.559$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the study rejected the null hypothesis which stated that there was no significant relationship between the 'competence' dimension of psychological empowerment and job satisfaction of guest house supervisors. The findings denoted that for each unit increase in the 'competence' psychological empowerment, there was 0.559 units increase in job satisfaction of guest house supervisors. This implied that the more competent the supervisors felt the more likely they were satisfied with their jobs.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the relevance of the competence tenet of psychological empowerment has been captured by many researchers (Ponton, 2011; Hancer & George, 2009; Hsiang-Fei, et al., 2014; Koen, & Maaik van, 2011; Buitendach & Hlalele, 2005; Gachunga, Maina & Kabare, 2016; Nassar, 2017). However, all of these studies were done in classified hospitality establishments and other sectors of the economy. The small hospitality establishments, for instance, guest houses, have been shunned by many researchers. This research clearly demonstrated the critical importance of enhancing guest house employees 'competence' which has been established to have a significant influence towards their job satisfaction. This can be utilized as a human resource strategy of curbing high staff turnover witnessed in the larger hospitality industry worldwide. As such, this study recommends that the various organizations under the Ministry of Tourism such as Kenya Tourism Board, Kenya Association of Hotelkeepers and Caterers, and Pubs Entertainment and Restaurant Association of Kenya should come up with policies and guidelines on how employee competence in their sectors could be enhanced.

This could be in form of seminars, workshops and regular trainings. In addition, managers of guest houses should come up with in-house short courses for their employees and encourage them to participate in relevant outside trainings in order to sharpen their job skills. Finally, other researchers could explore this area using other research methodologies such as holding focus groups with the respondents.

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