



Sustainable Employee Empowerment and Customer Satisfaction in Hotels in Umuahia

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Abstract: *The study examined the sustainable employee empowerment and customer satisfaction in hotels in Umuahia. The objectives of the study are; To examine the application of employee empowerment on the hotels in the study area, ascertain the role of the applied employee empowerment status on customer satisfaction in the study area, examine the factors affecting employee empowerment in an organization in the study area, determine the way forward to employee empowerment in the study area. To achieve the objective of the study, survey research design was adopted. The researcher adopted primary data in getting the required information through the use of structured questionnaire. The population of the study is 38 registered hotels in Umuahia, Abia State with 520 staff strength. The sample size of the study is 226 after adopting Taro Yamane formula. In analyzing the data, simple descriptive statistics was used. The findings revealed that there is high level of application of employee empowerment in hotel establishments. The findings also revealed that applied employee empowerment plays a significant role on customer satisfaction in the study area. The findings further revealed that there are many factors affecting employee empowerment in the hotel establishments which includes lack of skills, lack of trust, lack of clear policies, job insecurity, failure to identify empowerment, lack of top management example and lack of training. The study recommends that employees need to be trained and updated to be knowledgeable and resource full to give full-fledged service to the customers they are rendering service. Training for technical and interactive skills: for employees to deliver service quality they need an on-going training in the necessary technical skills and knowledge and in- process or interactive skills.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Hospitality industry all over the world has been increasingly getting worried about employee empowerment. The hospitality industry is a service industry. According to Swain & Mishra (2011) the hospitality business is based on the culture of serving guests with warmth and care so that they feel comfortable and secure. They have also stated that hospitality is the fundamental need for travelers, pilgrims, wanderers, tourists etc. because it gives them a strong feel of home away from home. Hospitality is defined as a particular type of relationship between a host and a guest Schiffman Kanuk (2015). As we know that employee is the backbone of the organization because he/she is the only person who is directly in touch with the customer on the time of service delivery. Oloko & Ogutu (2012) defined employee empowerment as the ways in which hotel establishments provide their employees with a certain degree of autonomy and control in their day-to-day activities. This can include having a voice in process improvement, helping to create and manage new systems and tactics, and running smaller departments with less oversight from higher-level management (Yeh-Yun-Lin 2012). A key principle of employee empowerment is providing employees the means for making important decisions and helping ensure those decisions are correct. When deployed properly, this should result in heightened productivity and a better quality of employee work and work life.

Empowerment is the degree of autonomy and self-determination in people and in job environment. This enables them to represent their interests in a responsible and self-determined way, acting on their own authority. It is the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights. Empowerment as action refers both to the process of self-empowerment and to professional support of people, which enables them to overcome their sense of powerlessness and lack of influence, and to recognize and use their resources. Empowerment of employee will guide the productivity improvement, job satisfaction, individual and organizational performance (Shazia, Azhar & Nadeem, 2010). Employee empowerment has been associated with the

concept of power, implying that power in the organization should be re-shared by the top management to the lower management (Vogt 1997 in Wolf 2010). Without empowerment employee will not be confident, not be creative and will not have the technical knowledge, therefore, unable to provide better performance as per expectation. Employee will be successful if management provides them with some level of authority and systematic knowledge according to their work, which is known as the employee empowerment. The continuous development of employee empowerment directly affects the quality of service and satisfaction level of customer towards the service provider. Whereas at present scenario all the service industries are making themselves strong in order to increase the quality of service and customer satisfaction. Employee empowerment is one of the reflections of this modern approach to man management. It invariably leads to a positive change within the organization (Chatura, 2013). Empowered employees are more motivated as compared to those who just follow the given lines. Employee empowerment creates sense of belongingness and ownership towards the parent organization.

Shunda (2018). Stated that Empowerment is getting workers to do what needs to be done rather than doing what they are told and it involves delegation, individual responsibility, autonomous decision making and feelings of self efficacy. Managers empower their subordinates by delegating responsibilities and assisting them when they have problems. This makes subordinates to be more satisfied with their managers and in return they will perform to the managers' expectations (Shunda, 2018). Furthermore, he said 'there are three closely inter-linked essentials which are the keys to the success of employee empowerment in organization. These include:

- i. Attitude: This relates to the psychological stance (frame of mind) of an individual or group of individuals, in respect to a concept, central theme or idea. In general, Shunda (2018), noted that one's attitude are learned from those in authority over one (parents, teachers, managers) and are reinforced by subsequent experience unless or until some other different experience enlightens with a new message entirely.
- ii. Commitment: This is a sense of duty and obligation to ones organization. Shunda (2018), suggested that, everyone in the enterprise, direct from the managing director downward must accept responsibility to make sure that the process of employee empowerment is successful in organization.
- iii. Involvement: This is considered as the keystone of corporate success for employee empowerment. Shunda (2018), noted that where employees are involved in the identification, discussion and agreement of personal objectives (in relation to corporate plan) there is a higher desire to ensure that the task for which one is responsible, is carried out efficiently and effectively.

Shunda (2018), further stated that for employee empowerment programme to be successful in organization, management must put in place a structure in the system to support the whole process. They suggested the basic pillars of employee empowerment as thus:

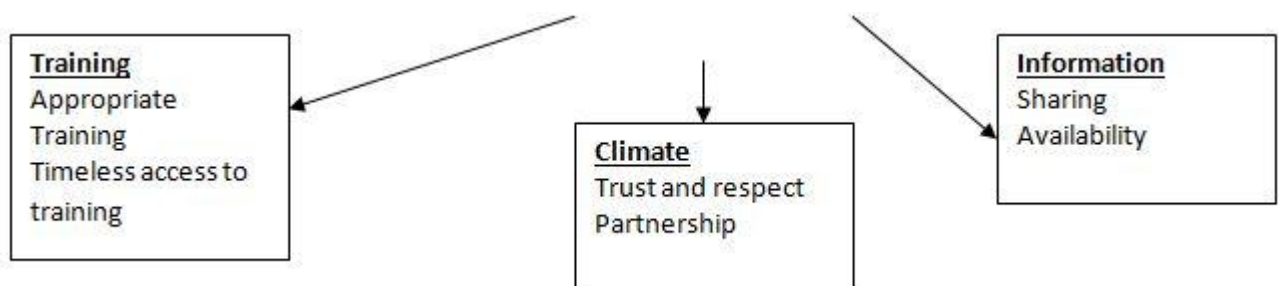


Fig1.

Source: Shunda (2018)

According to Bass, Avolio, Zhu, Koh and Bhatia (2004 in Boudrias, Gaudreau, Savoie and Morin 2013). satisfaction is a notion associated with the job. Furthermore, the satisfaction of a leader's action makes the employee more motivated and committed to attaining organizational and group goals. The important achievement from the point of view of the organization is its employee

performance. The growth, achievement of the organization is the effort of all employees in the organization, not a few. The purpose of performance as a key multi-dimensional construct is to achieve goals, which are linked to organizational strategic goals Mwita (2004 in Gandhi & Kang 2012). Customer satisfaction in hospitality industry is posited to be a function of service quality i.e. customer service, corporate image, price, innovativeness and convenience, among others (Colwell, Scott, Jiang and Joshi 2016). Odindo and Delvin (2010) noted that increase customer satisfaction has the potential to enhance organizational performance and as a result managers should have customer satisfaction as a key target. Oloko&Ogutu (2012) stated that, in recent past, employee empowerment has been promoted as a general recipe for enhancing work performance. In support of the above, Manzoor (2013) claimed that, empowerment provides benefits to organizations and makes sense of belonging and pride in the workforce. He further contended that, it builds a win-win connection among organizations and employees, which is considered an ideal environment in numerous organizations and their employees. Empowered employees focus their job and work-life with additional importance and this leads to constant progress in coordination and work procedures. In his contribution to empowerment literature, Ayinde (2012) provided a lucid definition: 'empowerment means giving power or entitlement to people, helping them acquire capabilities or qualifications, establishing structures which enable them to have more control over decisions affecting them.

Customer satisfaction is a business philosophy which tends to the creation of value for customers, anticipating and managing their expectations, and demonstrating ability and responsibility to satisfy their needs (Peters and Mazdarani 2011). Quality of service and customer satisfaction are critical factors for success of any business Gronoos (1990), Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) in Garrison and Noreen (2015). As Valdani (2009) points out: enterprises exist because they have a customer to serve. The key to achieve sustainable advantage lies in delivering high quality service that results in satisfied customers Shemwell, Yavas and Bilgin (1998 in Nicholson and Broione 2012). Service quality and customer satisfaction are key factors in the battle to obtain competitive advantage and customer retention. Customer satisfaction is the outcome of customer's perception of the value received in a transaction or relationship, where value equals perceived service quality, compared to the value expected from transactions or relationships with competing vendors. In order to achieve customer satisfaction, it is important to recognize and to anticipate customers' needs and to be able to satisfy them. Enterprises which are able to rapidly understand and satisfy customers' needs, make greater profits than those which fail to understand and satisfy them Barsky & Nash, (2003 in Peters and Mazdarani 2011). Since the cost of attracting new customers is higher than the cost of retaining the existing ones, in order to be successful managers must concentrate on retaining existing customers implementing effective policies of customer satisfaction and loyalty. This is especially true in the hotel industry.

Retention refers as a commitment to continue to do business or exchange with a particular company on an ongoing basis. Retention also can be defined as the customers' liking, identification, commitment, trust, willingness to recommend, and repurchase intentions, with the first four being emotional-cognitive retention constructs, and the last two being behavioral intention (Stauss, Chojnacki, Decker and Hoffman 2011). According to Lockyer (2015), customer retention is deeply held commitment to rebuy or patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour. Later, Chatura (2013) defines customer retention is the propensity of the customer to stay with their service provider. Many organization today having difficulty to attract new customer so the restructures their marketing department and appoint managers to give attention to their existing customer (Ahmad and Buttle, 2012). Customer retention is very important for the hotel in order to ensure hotel sustainability and growth for a long time; therefore, it is the hotel's duty to ensure that they had been able to fulfil all the customer's needs and wants from time to time. Whenever crises arise, they need to be alerted to the current situation and be able to respond to it quickly. Besides that, hotel's management needs to ensure that individual customer is satisfied with the service standard. If management is serious about helping customers succeed, retention is a necessary but not sufficient component to their satisfaction. In fact, retention should be the minimal expectation for customer success that they simply return to the hotel after their first year (Kahrig, 2015). It is against this background the study tends to examine the employee empowerment and customer satisfaction; an approach to customers retention and sustainability of hotel establishment.

Globalization has opened up various opportunities and challenges for hotel operations to compete internationally. Besides technological advancement, a developed, competent and empowered workforce will give hotel operations an edge over its competitors. Studies on empowerment have shown that it has a strong correlation to employee performance in terms of higher productivity, job satisfaction and reduction in staff turnover in hotel operations (Oluabunwa 2010). This, leads to the question of, is this correlation applicable to the hotel operations customers' retention and sustainability. This question is prompted based on Lin (2012). Rating on hotel establishment in umuahia indicates operations of non-employee empowerment.

Empowerment is a well-studied subject in Nigeria, but little research has been conducted in hotel operations. So far on employee empowerment in the Abia state, have been found to focus on the institutions rather than hotel operations as a whole. Studies on the impact of empowerment on employee performance in umuahia hotel operations, however, is still lacking. As a result, this study puts forward a model to link between employee empowerment and customer satisfaction to impact customer's retention and sustainability of hotel establishment. This model introduced constructs of training and development, engagement (inputting and control) and trust (employee access to information flow and serving others-feedback), as three employee empowerment and self-determination factors.

Despite the enormous amount of research work carried out in the field of employee empowerment, throughout the developed and emerging economies of the world, In short, there is little or nothing known about the importance of employee empowerment influence on customers' satisfaction in hotel industry in Nigeria. This study therefore posits that, employee empowerment can be the panacea to the public distrust and lack of customers' satisfaction in the hotel industry in Nigeria (Parker and Price 1994 in Taylor and Baker 2015). It is based on these identified problems that this study is set to provide a structured and investigation that will set to reveal the influence of sustainable employee empowerment and customer satisfaction in hotels in Umuahia.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to examine the sustainable employee empowerment and customer satisfaction in hotels in Umuahia. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the application of employee empowerment practices on hotels in the study area.
2. To ascertain the role of the applied employee empowerment practices on customer satisfaction in the study area.
3. To examine the factors affecting the application of employee empowerment practices in hotels in the study area.
4. To determine the way forward to employee empowerment in the study area

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the applications of employee empowerment practices on hotels in the study area?
2. What are the roles of the applied employee empowerment practices on customer satisfaction in the study area?
3. What are the factors affecting the application of employee empowerment practices in hotels in the study area?
4. What are the ways forward to employee empowerment in the study area?

4. METHODOLOGY

Research Design: For the purpose of achieving the objectives of the study, a survey research design was used.

Area of the Study: This study will be carried out in Umuahia, Abia State. Abia State is located in the south east geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

Population for the Study: The population for this study is made up of all the registered hotels in Umuahia, Abia State. However, there are thirty eight (38) registered hotels in Umuahia with five hundred and twenty employees (520) (National Association of Hotels, Umuahia Chapter, 2019).

Sample Size: To ensure the determination of accurate sample size, the statistical formula derived by Taro Yamane (1964) was employed to get the sample size of 223 from the population.

Sampling Technique: The study adopted purposive and convenient sampling techniques, The reason for choosing purposive sampling is because the hotels are not the same both in development and size of accommodation. Purposive sampling will be used to select ten Hotels in Umuahia, Abia State. While convenient sampling will be used to select respondents based on availability.

Instrument for Data Collection: The researcher used questionnaire and personal interview in obtaining the needed information from the respondents.

Method of Data Collection: A well-structured questionnaire was designed and administered to 226 respondents.

Statistical Techniques for Data Analysis: The simple descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentage, mean and standard deviation was used to analyze respondents' personal data and research questions.

5. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Question 1: What are the applications of employee empowerment practices on the hotels in the study area?

Table1. Mean responses of respondents on applications of employee empowerment practices on the hotels in the study area.

S/N	Employee Empowerment Practices	SA	A	D	SD	Total no	Total score	Mean	Remark
1	Provision of necessary resources to employees	100(58%)	40(23%)	20 (12%)	12(7%)	172	572	3.33	Accepted
2	Delegation of responsibilities to employees	90(52%)	70(41%)	12(7%)	0	172	594	3.45	Accepted
3	Setting clear expectation	102(59%)	44(25.5%)	24 (14%)	2(1%)	172	590	3.43	Accepted
4	Recognition of employee hard work	94(54.5%)	60(35%)	18 (10.5%)	0	172	592	3.44	Accepted
5	Giving employee autonomy over assignment	80(46.5%)	80(46.5%)	12(7%)	0	172	584	3.40	Accepted
6	Training of employee	100(58%)	40(23%)	20 (12%)	12(7%)	172	572	3.33	Accepted
						Grand	Mean	3.40	

Note: SA=strongly agreed, A= agreed, U= undecided, D=disagreed, SD= strongly disagreed

The table 1 above shows that 58% of the respondents strongly agreed that provision of necessary resources to employees is one of the applications of employee empowerment on the hotels in the study area, 23% of the respondents agreed, 12% of the respondents disagreed, 7% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.33 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5.

52% of the respondents agreed that delegation of responsibilities to employees is one of the applications of employee empowerment on the hotels in the study area, 41% of the respondents agreed, 7% of the respondents disagreed, while 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.45 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5

59% of the respondents strongly agreed that setting clear expectation is one of the applications of employee empowerment on the hotels in the study area, 25.5% of the respondents agreed, 14% of the

respondents disagreed, while 1% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.43 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5.

54.5% of the respondents agreed that recognition of employee hard work is one of the applications of employee empowerment on the hotels in the study area, 35% of the respondents agreed, 10.5% of the respondents disagreed, while 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.44 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5.

46.5% of the respondents strongly agreed that giving employee autonomy over assignment is one of the applications of employee empowerment on the hotels in the study area, 46.5% of the respondents agreed, 7% of the respondents disagreed, while 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.40 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5.

58% of the respondents strongly agreed that training of employee is one of the applications of employee empowerment on the hotels in the study area, 23% of the respondents agreed, 12% of the respondents disagreed, while 12.7% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.33 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5.

Question 2: What are the roles of the applied employee empowerment practices on customer satisfaction in the study area?

Table 2. Mean responses of the respondents on the roles of the applied employee empowerment practices on customer satisfaction in the study area?

S/N	Roles of Applied Employee Empowerment practices on customer satisfaction	SA	A	D	SD	Total no	Total score	M	Remark
1	Delegation of responsibilities to employees enhances customer satisfaction	88(51%)	58(34%)	26(15%)	0	172	578	3.36	Accepted
2	Setting clear expectation to employees affect customer satisfaction	80(46.5%)	80(46.5%)	12(7%)	0	172	584	3.40	Accepted
3	Recognition of employee hard work improves their service to customers	96(54.5%)	60(35%)	18(10.5%)	0	172	592	3.44	Accepted
4	Giving employee autonomy over assignment affect employee job performance thereby enhancing customer satisfaction	100(58%)	40(23%)	20(12%)	12(7%)	172	572	3.33	Accepted
5	Training of employee positively affect their job performance thereby enhancing customer satisfaction	90(52%)	70(41%)	12(7%)	0	172	594	3.45	Accepted
						Grand	Mean	3.40	

Note: SA=strongly agreed, A= agreed, D=disagreed, SD= strongly disagreed

The table 2 above shows that 51% of the respondents strongly agreed that delegation of responsibilities to employees enhances customer satisfaction, 34% of the respondents agreed, 15% of the respondents disagreed, while 7% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.36 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5.

46.5% of the respondents strongly agreed that setting clear expectation to employees affect customer satisfaction, 46.5% of the respondents agreed, 7% of the respondents disagreed, while 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.40 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5

54.5% strongly agreed that recognition of employee hard work improves their service to customers, 35% agreed, 10.5% of the respondents disagreed, while 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.44 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5.

58% of the respondents agreed that giving employee autonomy over assignment affect employee job performance thereby enhancing customer satisfaction, 23% of the respondents agreed, 12% of the respondents disagreed, while 7% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.33 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5.

52% of the respondents strongly agreed that training of employee positively affect their job performance thereby enhancing customer satisfaction, 41% of the respondents agreed, 7% of the respondents disagreed, while 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.45 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5.

Question 3: What are the factors affecting the application of employee empowerment practices in an organization in the study area?

Table3. Mean responses of respondents on the factors affecting the application of employee empowerment practices in Hostels in the study area?

S/N	Factors affecting employee empowerment practices	SA	A	D	SD	Total no	Total score	Mean	Remark
1	Lack of funds	110(64%)	50(29%)	12(7%)	0	172	614	3.57	Accepted
2	Lack of trust	100(58%)	52(30%)	20(12%)	0	172	596	3.47	Accepted
3	Lack of clear policies	90(52%)	70(41%)	12(7%)	0	172	594	3.45	Accepted
4	Job insecurity	120(70%)	42(24%)	10(6%)	0	172	626	3.64	Accepted
5	Failure to identify empowerment	88(51%)	58(34%)	26(15%)	0	172	578	3.36	Accepted
6	Lack of top management example	110(64%)	50(29%)	12(7%)	0	172	614	3.57	Accepted
7	Lack of training	100(58%)	52(30%)	20(12%)	0	172	596	3.47	Accepted
						Grand	Mean	3.50	

Note: SA=strongly agreed, A= agreed, D=disagreed, SD= strongly disagreed

The table 3 above shows that 64% of the respondents strongly agreed that lack of funds is one of the factors affecting employee empowerment in an organization in the study area, 29% of the respondents agreed, 7% of the respondents disagreed, while 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.57 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5.

The table also shows that 58% of the respondents agreed that lack of trust is one of the factors affecting employee empowerment in an organization in the study area, 30% of the respondents agreed, 12% of the respondents disagreed, while 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.47 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5

52% of the respondents strongly agreed that lack of clear policies is one of the factors affecting employee empowerment in an organization in the study area, 41% of the respondents agreed, 7% of the respondents disagreed, while 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.45 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5.

70% of the respondents strongly agreed that job insecurity is one of the factors affecting employee empowerment in an organization in the study area, 24% agreed, 6% disagreed, while 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.64 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5.

51% of the respondents strongly agreed that failure to identify empowerment is one of the factors affecting employee empowerment in an organization in the study area, 34% of the respondents agreed, 15% of the respondents disagreed, while 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.36 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5.

70% of the respondents strongly agreed that lack of top management example is one of the factors affecting employee empowerment in an organization in the study area, 24% of the respondents agreed, 6% of the respondents disagreed, while 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.64 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5.

51% of the respondents strongly agreed that lack of training is one of the factors affecting employee empowerment in an organization in the study area, 34% of the respondents agreed, 15% of the respondents disagreed, while 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.36 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5.

Question 4: What are the ways forward to employee empowerment in the study area?

Table4. Mean responses of the respondents on the ways forward to employee empowerment in the study area

S/N	The Way forward to employee empowerment	SA	A	D	SD	Total no	Total score	M	Remark
1	Training of employee	88(51%)	58(34%)	26(15%)	0	172	578	3.36	Accepted
2	Provision of job security	80(46.5%)	80(46.5%)	12(7%)	0	172	584	3.40	Accepted
3	Proper identification of empowerment	96(54.5%)	60(35%)	18(10.5%)	0	172	592	3.44	Accepted
4	Setting clear management policies	100(58%)	40(23%)	20(12%)	12(7%)	172	572	3.33	Accepted
5	Trustworthiness	90(52%)	70(41%)	12(7%)	0	172	594	3.45	Accepted
						Grand	Mean	3.40	

Note: SA=strongly agreed, A= agreed, U= undecided D=disagreed, SD= strongly disagreed.

The table 4 above shows that 51% of the respondents strongly agreed that training of employee is the way forward to employee empowerment in the study area, 34% of the respondents agreed, 15% of the respondents disagreed, while 7% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.36 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5.

46.5% of the respondents strongly agreed that provision of job security is the way forward to employee empowerment in the study area, 46.5% of the respondents agreed, 7% of the respondents disagreed, while 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.40 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5

54.5% of the respondents strongly agreed that proper identification of empowerment is the way forward to employee empowerment in the study area, 35% of the respondents agreed, 10.5% of the respondents disagreed, while 0% strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.44 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5.

58% of the respondents strongly agreed that setting clear management policies is the way forward to employee empowerment in the study area, 23% of the respondents agreed, 12% of the respondents disagreed, while 7% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.33 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5.

52% of the respondents strongly agreed that trustworthiness is the way forward to employee empowerment in the study area, 41% of the respondents agreed, 7% of the respondents disagreed, while 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed. This was accepted with a mean score of 3.45 which was more than the acceptable level of 2.5.

6. MAJOR FINDINGS

The major Findings of this study include:

- i. High level of delegation of responsibilities to employees, recognition of employee hard work, and setting clear expectations to employees among hotels are the dimensions of employee empowerment practices applicable in the study area.
- ii. Customer satisfaction is enhanced among hotels by training employees which positively affect their job performance, recognition of employee hard work and setting clear expectations to employees in the study area.
- iii. High level of job insecurity, lack of fund to implement empowerment practices, lack of top management example and lack of training among hotels are the major factors affecting the application of employee empowerment practices in the study area.
- iv. The way forward to employee empowerment practices among hotels in the study area include high level of trustworthiness in employees, proper identification of empowerment gaps in employees and provision of job security.

7. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of research question one shows that delegation of responsibilities to employees, recognition of employee hard work, and setting clear expectations to employees are the major applications of employee empowerment on hotels in the study area. The findings of this study is in line with that of Kahrig (2015), which revealed similar items as the applications of employee empowerment on the hotels. The finding is also consistent to the findings of Wilkins (2015), which revealed that employee autonomy over assignment and training of employee are the applications of employee empowerment on the hotels. Also the findings of Muhammad (2017) presented a study on the Employee empowerment and customer satisfaction. This study is focused on the services sector especially in banking sectors of Pakistan. The finding is revealed that delegation of responsibilities to employees, setting clear expectation, recognition of employee hard work, are the applications of employee empowerment in hotels in Pakistan. Consequently, the findings of Joleen (2016), who also revealed that items similar to the aforementioned items as the applications of employee empowerment.

The findings of research question two reveals that Training of employees positively affects their job performance thereby enhancing customer satisfaction, recognition of employees hard work improves their service to customers, and setting clear expectations to employees are the major roles of the applied employee empowerment practices on customer satisfaction in the study area. The finding is consistent to the findings of Ohuabunwa (2010), which revealed that delegation of responsibilities to employees, setting clear expectation to employees, recognition of employee hard work, giving employee autonomy over assignment enhances customer satisfaction. The findings is also consistent to the findings of Kemefasu (2014) who carried out a research on the employee empowerment and customer satisfaction a panacea to customer retentions and sustainability of hotel establishments in Korea. The findings revealed that employee empowerment affect their job performance and enhances customer satisfaction. Also the findings of Avci, Madanoglu&Okumus (2011) who investigates employee empowerment and its influence on customer loyalty and customer retentions through customer satisfaction.

The findings of research question three shows that Job insecurity, lack of fund, lack of top management example and lack of training are the most factors affecting the application of employee empowerment practices in hotels in the study area. The finding is consistent to the findings of Akintunde (2015), which revealed that lack of funds, lack of trust, job insecurity, failure to identify empowerment, as the factors affecting employee empowerment in an organization. The finding is also consistent to the findings of Hwang, & Lambert, (2018) who conducted a research on the employee empowerment and customer satisfaction. Their findings revealed similar factors that factors affecting employee empowerment in an organization.

The findings of research question four above shows that trustworthiness in employees, followed by proper identification of Empowerment gaps in employees, and provision of job security are mostly the way forward to employee empowerment practices in hotels in the study area. The finding is consistent to the findings of Shunda (2018), which revealed that training of employee, provision of job security, proper identification of empowerment as the way forward to employee empowerment. The finding is also consistent to the findings of Caterina and Bulgarella (2015) who conducted a study on Employee empowerment and customer satisfaction in hospitality industry in Tanzania. Their study revealed factors similar to the aforementioned factors the way forward to employee empowerment.

8. CONCLUSION

The employees are empowered to deliver quality services to customers. Empowerment has much to offer organizations operating services. Empowered employees react to customer needs as they arise, they respond quickly to complaints and take personal pride in ensuring that service encounters are a success. Importantly, they feel pride and concern for the customer experience. These are all experiences workers of these popular hotels had to share. However, despite all the positive points given by employees which suggest that empowerment concept is being implemented, the submissions given by employees when asked about challenges they face seems contradicting. Management is therefore advised to make clear the level of autonomy given to the employees and the employees are also advised to work within their limit. A more reflective consideration suggests that claims for employee empowerment need to take account of different definitions and meanings used by managers. These different managerial meanings will be shaped by perceptions and concerns about the needs of the particular operation in question. Managers are to encourage more participation in the service interaction by the employee and the researcher hereby conclude that empowering employees is the best thing to do to gain an edge over competitors. However the challenges these hotels expressed are common organizational problems that need to be resolved by intensifying education on effective practice of the concept of employee empowerment. There are different empirical studies relating to this research topic for example SaidiWasi Jackson (2017) examined employee empowerment and customer satisfaction in Indonesia. Muhammad (2017) presented a study on the Employee empowerment and customer satisfaction. Joleen (2016) carried out a research on the employee empowerment and customer satisfaction an approach to customer retention and sustainability of hotel establishment in USA. Thus, none of these works was carried out in Umuahia, Abia State,. Also, none of these studies was carried out in 2021 and that is the gap this study intends to fill.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations have been made:

- i. I hereby recommend that there should be delegation of responsibilities to employees, this means putting employees in charge of what they do with less supervision in hotels in the study area, employees hard work should be fully recognized to encourage them, and setting clear expectations to employees to improve their productivity should be applied in employee empowerment practices on hotels in the study area.
- ii. Employees should be trained to improve their job performance positively thereby enhancing customer satisfaction in hotels in the study area, this will help them to give prompt service to customers by anticipating and meeting up customer expectations; this way customer satisfaction can be enhanced.
- iii. I also recommend that Job insecurity should be eliminated in the work place, there should provision of funds to implement empowerment practices, management should be of an example to employee, and train employees to build competence in them.
- iv. I also recommend that hotels in the study area should adhere to the way forward to employee empowerment such as ensuring trustworthiness in employees, proper identification of empowerment gaps in employees, and provision of job security to employees to encourage them to perform their duties effectively in a way that will lead to Customer satisfaction.

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