The effect of employees' behaviour on organisational competitiveness in hospitality

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this research was to establish the effect of employee behaviour on organisational competitiveness in the hospitality industry. A sample of 51 employees took part in the study. Results show that employee attitude and perceptions towards various aspects of hotel operation are key antecedents that shape employee behaviour. It was established that employee behaviour has a direct effect on organisational competitiveness. For future improvements, it is recommended that managers within the hospitality establishments make conscious efforts to involve employees in operational decision-making, communicate ideas in a way that is easy to understand, and lastly the salaries of employees should be adjusted periodically following key inflation factors such as the prices of essential commodities.

KEYWORDS: employee attitude, employee behaviour, employee perception, organisational competitiveness

Introduction

For organisations to be competitive, employees must develop a close networking relationship while performing daily operations (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013). In a typical hospitality business operation, creation of memorable experiences for the guests should be the goal of every employee. Despite the recognised need for departments to work together, often negative behaviour by some employees such as tardiness results in guests being disappointed by having to wait to be served at different touch points of service. If there is a communication gap between housekeeping and front office staff such as prioritisation of the cleaning and inspection of a room in a timely manner, it may lead to the guest having to wait in the lobby which affects the guest’s check-in experience.

Other observable forms of negative employee behaviour which affect organisations’ competitiveness include employees’ emphasis on exaggerating the seriousness of other staff mistakes, especially from different departments, instead of directing their efforts in working together to achieve a common goal of creating memorable guest experiences. Some employees have the habit of discussing another colleague's poor performance without their input, and this kind of employee behaviour contradicts the core values of service improvement and prevents developing the confidence of those affected to perform their duties effectively.

Ignoring employees with such negative behaviour leads to more incidents of bad experience for the guests which results in reduced repeat business for the organisation besides creating a hostile working environment for other employees, and a negative impact on the hotel's reputation. Therefore, understanding employees’ behaviour is critical in identifying, analysing, and comprehending factors that impact the way different employees react to different operational situations at work (James & Jones, 1976). This research therefore tests the effect of negative employee behaviour on organisations' competitiveness. Understanding negative employee behaviour allows management of hospitality organisations to take actions aimed at minimising negative employee behaviour, which allows the hotel to turn potential guests into loyal customers and encourage repeat business.

Literature review

According to Judge (2009), behaviour is the ultimate product of attitude, and to understand behaviour, one has to understand that there are hidden factors that shape an individual’s attitude. Attitude is defined as the position that one assumes towards objects, people, events, or situations (Bos-Nehles & Veenendaal, 2019). Attitudes can be positive or negative and they reflect how a person feels about a certain situation or thing.

According to Judge (2009), attitudes manifest in three ways: cognition, affect, and behaviour. Cognition involves making sense of the situation and describes how it seems. For instance, an employee asserting that the pay at the organisation where she or he works is low is a description of the situation. And, the description of the situation (cognition) determines how one will be influenced by it. The second aspect, also known as the affect, is the emotional reaction towards the cognition and reflects how one feels about the situation that has been described. For instance: “The pay at my organisation is low, I dislike working in my organisation.” The cognition of the situation leads to a certain feeling, which in this case is dissatisfaction. Finally, the third aspect is the behavioural outcome which is motivated by emotion. For example: “The pay at my organisation is low,
I dislike working", and therefore, "I will not give my best effort". The preceding examples help to address the complexity of attitudes which aids in the understanding of individual employee job behaviour.

Robbins and Judge (2014) posit that organisational behaviour is shaped by peoples' perception of, rather than the actual, reality – the reason why individuals often look at the same thing and perceive it differently. This outcome can be attributed to three main factors: the perceiver, the target, and situation which influences an individual's perception of reality and determines their behaviour. When the perceiver encounters a certain situation, their perception is influenced by their personal characteristics, attitude, reasons, past experiences, and beliefs. For instance, if an employee expects the managers to be arrogant based on past experiences, they may perceive the next manager as such without even meeting them.

The "target" describes the characteristics of an individual and how they influence his/her perceptions. For instance, the most vocal employees are more likely to be noticed in a group of shy individuals. In this case, the perceiver might see the vocal employees as potential team leaders or they could also perceive them as obnoxious, based on their personal characteristics as a perceiver (Robbins & Judge, 2014).

Lastly, the "situation" provides the time, conditions, and location that surrounds an event that influences the attention of the perceiver. If an employee has to attend briefings every morning at 8 o'clock and he/she knows that there are traffic jams except on Thursdays. They would have to wake up an hour earlier on Thursdays to make it on time. Therefore, having to wake up an hour earlier on Thursdays would change their perception about morning briefings on Thursdays because of the different circumstances (Robbins & Judge, 2014).

Unlike Robbins and Judge (2014), Hofstede, Pedersen and Hofstede (2002) argue that behaviour is influenced by observations and interpretations. The main attribute that one needs to cultivate when interacting with other people is the ability to distinguish between observations and interpretations. Employees need to understand that sometimes what they see does not reflect what they think it means. Different signs, body language, and behaviours have different meanings across the globe, which is why not everything that one observes reflects one’s interpretation accurately. It is imperative that one keep in mind that a person's understanding of a situation is based on their own environment and experiences. Sometimes, to make the right interpretation of a certain situation, one needs to neglect past experiences and see things from a different perspective.

Alblas and Wijisman (2011) have a different opinion: that employee behaviour can be attributed to emotional commitment. The level of devotion that workers have towards their organisation determines the way they behave. Employees that are not committed to their organisation find it harder to deliver what is expected of them, let alone go the extra mile to make things happen. In addition, employees' behaviour is determined by how the employer invests in the employees to ensure their satisfaction (Stone, 2014).

Organisational competitiveness

Ukabuili and Igbojekwe (2015) opined that hotels need to meet guests’ expectations to earn their trust. When guests are satisfied with the services and products provided by the hotel, they talk about it favourably and this influences the creation of a positive image of the company. Having a good image allows the hotel to charge premium prices that guests will pay, and allows the company to differentiate itself from competitors in the market. Organisational competitiveness can be achieved through developing outstanding human-relations skills such as excellent communication, good staff cooperation, creative problem-solving, democratic management, and good decision-making. An effective implementation of these five human-relations skills allows hospitality organisations to reduce employee turnover, increase respect among peers, increase staff morale, employee confidence, and productivity, which drives more sales. Neglecting staff involvement in decision-making can affect both workers and customers. It could lead to an increase in complaints regarding service, the staff, and accidents may occur more often (Ukabuili & Igbojekwe, 2015).

Stipanovic and Baresa (2008) advocate that organisational competitiveness is determined by the way guests perceive the product and service quality. Guests determine this quality based on the treatment they receive from employees during their stay at the hotel. Employees interact with the guests regularly, and have to attempt to be mindful at all times to avoid exhibiting negative behaviour in front of the guests. Organisational competitiveness is achieved by delivering unique services so that guests can make a distinction from the competition. Developing innovative ideas allows the company to cement its position as one of the key players in the market.

Pesic, Melic and Stankovic (2012) suggest that there is a connection between employee behaviour and organisational competitiveness. They argue that in order for an organisation to be competitive, it needs to invest in the knowledge and competencies of the employees through providing further education and practical training. This would orient employees to ensure that they focus on the company goals, and ensure constant awareness of changes in the market, consequently improving their adaptability to a competitive environment.

Finally, Pioch and Gerhard (2014) support Pesic et al. (2012) by asserting that to achieve competitiveness a company needs to capitalise on its human resources to create a unique value proposition for its customers. Excellent organisations concentrate on maintaining supportive human relations, showing that they care for the employees, and showing willingness to adjust to their needs (Tromp & Blomme, 2014). Competitive organisations understand that they have to rely on the employees to deliver what is expected of them to achieve the company goals. Therefore, competitive organisations take care of their employees and enable them to deliver the best performance. The company needs to find a balance between monetary and non-monetary benefits. Although financial increments are a good way to boost employee motivation, employees also seek recognition, security and a sense of belonging (Burnes, 2009).
Conceptual model
The conceptual model in Figure 1 illustrates that a mixture of attitude and perception of employees in an organisation influences employee behaviour, which influences organisational competitiveness.

Research objectives
The research objectives of this study are as follows:
1. To determine the impact of negative attitudes on employee behaviour;
2. To establish the effect of employee perception based on assumptions on employee behaviour; and
3. To determine the effect of employee behaviour on organisational competitiveness.

The research questions that flowed from these objectives are:
1. What is the impact of employee attitude on employee behaviour?
2. What is the effect of employee perceptions on employee behaviour?; and
3. What is the effect of employee behaviour on organisational competitiveness?

Methods
To achieve the objectives of the study, an explanatory research design was adopted and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis were applied.

Population and sample size
The population for this research study included all employees from job bands 7 to 10 at an upscale branded hotel in the Middle East. The total number of employees in these job bands was 270 employees. A sample of 159 employees was used based on Krejcie and Morgan’s (1970) sample determination table. However, the number of returned and usable questionnaires was 51, representing a response rate of 32%. The sample of 51 was considered large enough to conduct statistical tests because a minimum of 30 respondents is usually sufficient (Lind, Marchal & Wathen, 2015).

Instrument development
A survey was chosen for this study because it allows the researchers to limit the responses and ensures objectivity when conducting empirical research. In this study, captive group surveys were the most suitable technique adopted because it enables one to study a group of individuals who belong to the same organisation, and their availability could be guaranteed. A captive environment allows the researchers to provide a detailed explanation of all the questions in the survey and therefore allows the respondents to have full understanding of the questionnaire (Veal, 2011).

The study variables were measured using items developed from the literature review and each question was anchored on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = “Strongly disagree” and 5 = "Strongly agree". Employee attitude was measured using six items with Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of (α = 0.884), employee perception with six items (α = 0.893), employee behaviour was taken to be a composite variable by computing the mean scores of employee attitude and perceptions with Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of (α = 0.938), and organisational competitiveness with three items (α = 0.871). According to Nunnally (1978), alpha values above 0.70 are sufficient and therefore the scales were considered reliable.

Data analysis
Data was analysed using the statistical software SPSS version 25. To determine the relationships among variables in this study, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted, while determination of causality between the study variables of employee behaviour and organisational competitiveness was carried out using a simple regression analysis.

Limitation
It is important to note that half way through the research, the company went through a management crisis related to negative employee behaviour that the researcher had already identified. This incident resulted in employee contracts having to be terminated. This led to employees’ reluctance in completing the questionnaire, hence the low response rate recorded. However, the reliability of the questionnaire was considered to be adequate and results can still be used to make valid recommendations.

FIGURE 1: Conceptual model
Results

Demographic characteristics of the sample
Results show that 72% of the respondents involved in the study were male and 28% were female. Furthermore, 63% of the respondents were within the age group 18–29 years, 35% in the age group 30–45 years, and 2% in the age group 46 to 59 years. For the education aspect, 4% of the respondents had only completed primary school, 43% had completed up to high school, 49% had a university degree and the remaining 4% had completed some other kind of education. For employee job bands, 41% of the employees were in job band 7, 16% were in job band 8, 39% in job band 9, and 4% were in job band 10. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents involved in the study.

Descriptive statistics of the variables in the study
The main variables of the study are employee attitude, employee perception, employee behaviour and organisational competitiveness. Employee attitude was measured using six items, as shown in Table 2.

The results in Table 2 show that most employees strongly agreed to being proud to work at an upscale, branded hotel in the Middle East ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.83$) representing 86% of the respondents. The least-rated item was whether benefits at the hotel are as good as or better than other companies ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.23$). For this question, only 59% of employees agreed that they had better benefits when compared to other companies, 22% answered neutrally to this statement, and 20% did not think the benefits were as good as other companies.

Descriptive statistics for employee perceptions
For this variable, the measurement item that was required to rate whether employees get the information they need to perform their duties was scored positively, with 82% agreeing ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.00$). The least-rated question was whether employees were given enough opportunity to develop their careers. The number of employees that agreed with the statement decreased to 66%, while 12% were neutral in this regard and a significant number of employees (20%) disagreed that they were getting enough opportunities to develop their careers. The rest of the descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3.

Descriptive statistics for organisation competitiveness
Table 4 shows that a majority of employees agreed that they had trust in the company where they work ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.95$). Another question that was asked to measure organisational competitiveness was whether employees saw other colleagues as being caring. Again, 70% of the employees agreed with the statement ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 1.02$), while 12% were neutral, and 18% disagreed that they see other employees showing that they care.

Relationship between employee attitude, employee perception, and organisation competitiveness
In order to establish the relationship between the study variables, a composite variable were created by computing the mean values of the items for each variable. A Pearson correlation was used because the data fulfilled the requirement for normality based on the skewness and kurtosis values that were all within the normal range. According to West, Finch and Curran (1995), skewness values that are above 2 and kurtosis statistics above 10 are not acceptable. This study adopted Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham’s (2010) and Kline’s (2011)
recommendation of skewness <3 and kurtosis <7 to reflect normally distributed data.

The assessment of multivariate normality for the final measurement instrument used in this study shows that the skewness values ranged from −0.243 to 1.512, while kurtosis values ranged from 0.035 to 3.454. These values are all below the recommended value of 3 and 7 respectively (West et al., 1995; Hair et al., 2010; Kline, 2011), which demonstrates that the responses were normally distributed. Table 5 shows the results of the correlation analysis.

Results from the Pearson correlation analysis in Table 5 show that there is a significant positive relationship between employee attitude and employee perceptions (r = 0.826, p < 0.001). In addition, there was a positive and significant relationship between employee attitude and organisation competitiveness with (r = 0.776, p < 0.001). Lastly the relationship between employee perceptions and organisation competitiveness was also strong and significant with (r = 0.804, p < 0.001).

**The effect of employee behaviour on organisation competitiveness**

The variable employee behaviour was operationalised using the summated scale of employee attitude and employee perceptions. When these two variables were regressed on employee behaviour, the variance explained was 100%. Therefore a simple linear regression analysis was used to establish the effect of employee behaviour on organisation competitiveness, and results show that employee behaviour explained 68.4% of the observed variance in organisational competitiveness ($R^2 = 0.684$, $\beta = 0.891$, $p < 0.001$).

**Discussion**

**The relationship between employee attitude, employee perception, and organisation competitiveness**

Emotional commitment is an important factor that helps in shaping employee behaviour. Lack of emotional commitment from some employees is the possible explanation for the negative employee behaviour observed in the hotel. Results show that 86% of employees were proud to work with the hotel, which indicates that a relatively significant number of employees are emotionally committed to the hotel. Although the majority of employees are emotionally committed to the company and show positive employee behaviour, they are likely to be influenced by the 14% who often display negative employee behaviour.

In addition, employees who lack emotional commitment and often display negative behaviour could also be influenced positively by the ones that are emotionally committed. These findings are in line with previous research studies carried out by Alblas and Wijsman (2011), who suggested that employees that are not emotionally committed to the company have a hard time delivering what is expected of them — let alone going the extra mile to achieve something that benefits the hotel. However, it should be noted that not all incidents of negative employee behaviour are caused by those who are less emotionally committed to the hotel, but rather this finding indicates that those that are less committed are more inclined to display negative behaviour.

Another reason that causes negative employee behaviour in the hotel is the “uneven distribution of” monetary benefits and non-monetary benefits. Previous research by Pioch and Gerhard (2014) indicates that in order for employees to perform well, the company needs to find a balance between monetary and non-monetary benefits. Based on results provided by the study at hand, it can be seen that almost half of the employees in job bands 7 and 10 in the hotel do not agree that the salary they earn is equivalent to the jobs they perform, which leads to negative attitudes and possibly negative employee behaviour ultimately. In fact, only 53% of employees think they are paid enough money to perform their duties. Almost half of the employees feel exploited as far as pay is concerned. Consequently, they perhaps do not feel compelled to perform to the best of their abilities, and instead they expend the least amount of energy required to get through the day.

These findings are supported by previous research studies (Bhaskar & Khera, 2013) which stated that when companies fail to invest in employees, this prompts negative employee attitudes which lead to negative performance and as a result company failure. While financial incentives are an effective way to motivate employees, there are other incentives that are equally important, including recognition, security and belonging. Having said that, results show that a relatively high number of employees receive recognition for the job they do ($M = 4.05$). However, there are more employees that receive recognition for the jobs they do as opposed to employees that earn enough money for their contribution in the hotel. In fact, the representative sample suggests that 80% of the employees think they have enough recognition, but only 53% of the employees think that they are paid fairly. The gap between pay and recognition indicates that not all employees who receive recognition perform well because

**TABLE 4: Descriptive statistics for organisation competitiveness (N = 51)**

| Item | Mean | Standard deviation | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|------|------|--------------------|----------|----------|
| An upscale branded hotel in the Middle East is a company that I trust. | 4.08 | 0.956 | −1.162 | 1.339 |
| I see colleagues showing they care. | 4.02 | 1.029 | −1.300 | 1.596 |
| I see colleagues doing the right thing | 3.80 | 1.184 | −0.733 | −0.454 |

**TABLE 5: Correlation analysis (N = 51)**

|                  | Employee attitude | Employee perceptions | Organisation competitiveness |
|------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Employee attitude | 1.000             |                      |                             |
| Employee perceptions | 0.826**         | 1.000                |                             |
| Organisation competitiveness | 0.776**         | 0.804**              | 1.000                       |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)**
those same employees are part of those who believe that they do not get paid enough for their jobs.

Finally, the results show that almost half of the employees do not think they belong in the company — in fact, only 58% of employees can see themselves working in this company in the next two years. This result perhaps indicates that there is a lack of empowerment and encouragement for employees to be involved in decision-making (Chang, Chiu & Chen, 2010). Lack of involvement in decision-making demotivates employees and they end up feeling left out and as a result they do not always buy into what the managers say, which can be reflected in employees undermining managers. Based on the results, it is paramount that managers in hospitality should endeavour to show employees that they care about their personal and career goals by encouraging them to expand and grow in terms of knowledge. This is likely to create employee commitment, which is an important facet for organisational competitiveness.

**The effect of employee behaviour on organisational competitiveness**

The management team at the hotel needs to make a conscious effort to improve employee behaviour. Results show that employee behaviour has an impact on organisational competitiveness ($R^2 = 0.684$, $β = 0.891$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, when employees display negative behaviour, this affects the hotel because guests choose to stay at competitor hotels. Ukabuilu and Igbojekwe (2015) stressed that organisational competitiveness is achieved by developing outstanding human-relations skills, including excellent communication, good staff cooperation, excellent problem-solving, good decision-making and democratic management. These claims confirm what the results reflect of the hotel. The results show that management often fails to provide enough information to employees and as a result they end up making wrong assumptions about situations that happen in the hotel. The results also show that a larger number of employees say that communication in the hotel is not simple to absorb. Therefore, employees cannot understand essential information that they require to do their jobs. This situation forces employees to rely upon themselves to figure things out.

We can attribute some of the gap of information sharing between management and employees to language barriers given the fact that not every employee has good understanding of the English language. The managers have to make more effort to ensure that every colleague understands the information that they are trying to pass on to them. In fact, the results show that only 82% of employees receive all the information that they need to perform their duties. The remaining 18% of employees in job bands 7 and 10 rarely have all the information that they need to do their jobs. When managers hold back essential information, it prevents employees from delivering services up to the standards that guests expect. To support this finding, Ukabuilu and Igbojekwe (2015) opined that hotels need to exceed guests’ expectations to earn their trust.

Satisfied guests tell their friends favourable things about the hotel. Consequently, more guests come to the hotel, which allows the company to increase its market share and to gain a competitive edge in the market. Based on the results, it can be seen that team managers do not create strong team spirit among the employees. In fact, 32% of employees felt this. To improve team spirit, managers need to involve employees in the decision-making process, especially when the decision affects them. Pre-existing knowledge (Pesic et al., 2012) suggests that in order for employees to not lose focus of the goals set by the management, they need to be informed about changes taking place in the hotel to ensure their adaptability. Managers need to communicate their willingness to adjust to the needs of the employees because this will increase team morale, confidence and productivity.

**Conclusion**

To minimise negative employee attitudes, the hotel managers need to show employees that they are an important resource to ensure employee commitment to the organisation. This is because employees who are not committed to the organisation do not perform as expected. Based on these results, it was found that half of employees did not see themselves working in this hotel in the next two years ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 1.20$) which shows that they were looking for employment elsewhere, or they could be persuaded to leave the organisation. To resolve this problem, managers need to treat employees better so that they may feel encouraged to make extra effort. Likewise, the imbalance between non-monetary and monetary benefits needs to be resolved so employees may feel that they are getting rewarded for the valuable contributions that they bring to the hotel.

For employee perception to improve, there is a need to involve all employees at different levels in decision-making. This allows them to know what is happening in the company at all times. As a result, this awareness will improve their ability to handle problems because they will make decisions based on useful information provided by managers. This will also allow them to feel empowered because their managers trust them to make important decisions. It is important for managers to eliminate the gap in communication to avoid employees making the wrong assumptions. Managers need to make sure they communicate what is happening in the company and ensure that messages are understood by all employees.

This study conceptualised that that employee behaviour is the outcome of attitude and perception. Therefore, by eliminating negative attitude and perception based on assumptions, employee behaviour in the company is likely to improve. There is a strong and positive relationship between the variables of employee attitude and employee perceptions ($r = 0.826$, $p < 0.001$) and also a strong and positive relationship between employee perception and organisation competitiveness ($r = 0.804$, $p < 0.001$). The results clearly show that when employee behaviour is positive, it is likely to increase employee commitment to the organisation, which translates into organisation competitiveness (Wang, Wang, & Liu, 2018).

In addition, the study has also identified that employee behaviour at an upscale branded hotel in the Middle East has an impact on organisational competitiveness ($F(1, 49) = 106.156$, $p < 0.001$) with an $R^2 = 0.684$. Therefore, the less negative behaviour employees display, the more competitive the company becomes. It can be concluded that negative attitude and perception (assumptions) lead to negative employee behaviour and if not addressed this can lead to reduced organisational competitiveness. Given this conclusion, employees need to be encouraged to work as a team. Managers need to highlight the importance of sharing opinions and asking questions, especially on work-related issues. This will allow both
managers and employees to expand their knowledge, improve the working relationship and find new ways to get the work done. Another aspect that is recommended based on findings is to identify ways to communicate difficult ideas in a simple way that every employee can understand.

Finally, information sharing should be done in a logical step-by-step sequence regardless of its simplicity or complexity because the level of understanding varies from one employee to another. It is imperative that every employee understands what is happening in the company at all times because this gives a sense of involvement and as a result they become more committed to the hotel. The company should offer competitive salaries because money is an instrumental motivator for improving employee behaviour and organisational competitiveness because it is a tangible measure that provides a sense of recognition and is often perceived as a measure of achievement.

**Recommendations for further research**

For future consideration, a study that considers the influence of cultural diversity on organisation competitiveness and employee behaviour should be conducted. Culture has an impact on how individuals interpret certain situations. Research about leadership styles in an effort to improve organisational culture would add value to this current study. This will assist the company to create a system that allows every colleague to identify the dos and don’ts within the hotel and as a result find new ways of living and doing things.

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