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The Choice Cognition and Its Relationship with Job Satisfaction: A Case of Guest House Supervisors in Mombasa County, Kenya

Alex Kyalo Kivuva*
Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management
Kenyatta University (KU), Kenya

Abstract

‘Choice’ which is also known as ‘self-determination’ connotes autonomy in decision making in the workplace. Choice is a critical element of work for guest house supervisors. Guest houses have a bigger percentage of untrained staff, in comparison with the large star-rated hotels. For staff who have some hospitality training, they are usually recruited as supervisors. Despite this fact, managers and owners of guest houses tend to dictate every operation in their establishments. This has subsequently led to low employee empowerment, which has been a major source of job satisfaction. This study sought to explore the influence of the choice cognition of psychological empowerment on job satisfaction of guest house supervisors. This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, focusing on the seventy-six registered guest houses in Mombasa County. Census was utilised where all the supervisors of the registered guest houses in the county were included in the study. A semi-structured questionnaire was used in the collection of data. Pearson correlation coefficient and linear regression were used to establish the relationship between the study variables. Results of the study revealed that there existed a positive and significant influence ($p < 0.05$) of the choice tenet of psychological empowerment on job satisfaction ($r = 0.734$) of guest house supervisors in Mombasa County. This study would be crucial to guest house owners and managers who would be able to formulate and implement ‘choice’ strategies for their supervisors and other staff. In addition, it will be helpful to organizations such as Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Federation of Kenyan Employers, Kenya Association of Hotelkeepers and Caterers and Pubs Entertainment and Restaurant Association of Kenya in sensitizing their members on the importance of ensuring that employees have autonomy in making decisions (choice) concerning their work roles.

Keywords: Choice, Psychological Empowerment, Job Satisfaction, Guest houses, Supervisors

*Corresponding author: Alex Kyalo Kivuva; E-mail: kivuvaalex2014@gmail.com

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Introduction

‘Choice’ which is a tenet of psychological empowerment, also referred to as ‘self-determination’, connotes autonomy in decision making in the work place (Spreitzer & Mishra, 2002). To have ‘choice’ implies to have a sense of prudence in starting and governing one’s own activities in their jobs. Employees’ autonomy and interest in their

work can be increased by a supporting work environment, hence boosting the levels of job satisfaction. Spreitzer (2008) further defined choice as the autonomy exercised in performance of an employee's job. It also involves the chance of choosing activities that make sense and performing them in methods that look appropriate to the employee (Buitenbach & Hlalele, 2005). Employees who have 'choice' in their work activities are more likely to display quick and appropriateness in their responses in service recovery efforts on a consistent basis. Autonomy would also be displayed when making decisions concerning procedures, work methods, time and effort from employees who have 'choice' empowerment (Spreitzer, 2008).

Ponton (2011) in his study in the Australian hospitality industry posited that the more experienced employees rated 'choice' higher than the less experienced ones. As employees gained experience, senior management seemed to trust them more and therefore more autonomy was granted and they were monitored less. The higher feelings of autonomy suggested that the employees were more satisfied with their jobs and hence less likely to leave (Fiksembaun, Jeng, Koyunku & Burke, 2010; Ponton, 2011). In their study of the drivers of employees' job satisfaction in Taiwanese hospitality industry, Tsai, Cheng and Chang (2013) observed that employees' perceived that their 'choice' empowerment was very low. This meant that they had limited opportunities in terms of making job related decisions, hence affecting their job satisfaction negatively.

Further, Sut and Chad (2011) argued that Chinese hotel managers used the cognition of choice to give workers autonomy to find solutions to problems themselves. These actions fostered job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and eventually ensured low turnover intention among Chinese hospitality employees. Additionally, Hsiang-Fei, Sheng-Hshung and Ya-Yun, (2014) in their study on empowering hospitality employees in China argued that if employees possess autonomy in performing their duties, this generates a sense of job satisfaction. Their study revealed a positive correlation between autonomy of decision making among employees and their job satisfaction.

Karthik, Priyanko and Puiwa (2014) surveyed 365 frontline employees at forty units of restaurant chain in the USA in their study about leader empowering behaviors and employee psychological empowerment. They posited that there were two methods of achieving empowerment: through demonstrating trust of employees; and by giving them discretion to make own decisions in their job related activities. They found that employees recognized that they felt more empowered because they were less monitored by their superiors, hence, they felt trusted. However, they indicated that employees were quick to point out that they should not be 'abandoned' but 'trusted' in decision making without the constant direction of their seniors. In addition, Karthik, et al. (2014) pointed out that this 'trust' is not something which should be given freely but it is earned through experience and proper training. This translated to the employees' feeling of satisfaction with their jobs.

In the Turkish hospitality industry, Elbeyi, Yüksel and Yalçın (2011) surveyed 1,854 participants employed at five-star hotels. Their research posited that employees felt that they were well qualified and had confidence in their job tasks. Hence, they felt that they were the best positioned to make their daily work decisions. This was because they were close to their job roles and were aware of the best way a particular task should be tackled. This meant that employees felt more empowered when they were left to make the daily decisions on their work roles. In addition, they further found that decision making not only allowed the employees a feeling of empowerment, but it might also improve job satisfaction, efficiency and performance.

According to Sut and Chad (2011) in their research on employee empowerment in China, employees of luxury hospitality organizations perceived that power and authority were distributed unequally, which in turn led to low job satisfaction. These employees were used to hierarchical structures and leadership so much that they even often feared to have the initiative of making decisions without consulting their superiors. It is also important to point out that employees should be willing to accept empowerment as one of the conditions for its successful implementation (Humborstad, Humborstad, Whitfield & Perry, 2008b). That is, even though empowerment can be used as a management tool to achieve job satisfaction and better performance, it requires employee willingness to accept it (Bordin, Bartram & Casimir, 2012; Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009). Nassar (2017) in his study of hotel employees in Egypt also posited that employees who had high levels of autonomy in making decisions in their jobs had high levels of job satisfaction. In addition, in his study on psychological empowerment and job satisfaction in the hotel industry on Egyptian employees, Mohsen (2014) found a significant correlation between the cognition of choice and job satisfaction.

Other researchers in other fields of study have also found a positive correlation between employees' autonomy of decision making and their job satisfaction. For instance, Buitendach and Hlalele (2005) in their study of South Africa engineers in a petrochemical factory found a positive correlation of large effect between the choice cognition of psychological empowerment and job satisfaction. In essence, this finding implied that the two variables were related, that is, those engineers who perceived that they had authority and autonomy in making decisions at their work stations had a correspondingly high level of job satisfaction. Gachunga, Maina and Kabare (2016) in their study on the influence of psychological empowerment on organizational commitment in Kenyan civil service surveyed 384 respondents from four public organizations. Their study posited that the choice tenet of psychological empowerment was positively correlated to job satisfaction of civil servants, which subsequently lead to organizational commitment.

Employee participation in decision making is widely advocated for as an intervention which can be utilized in enhancing the levels of employee job satisfaction and organizational loyalty (Stephen, Marc & Likian, 2012). Participation of employees in making decisions also helps in enhancing the quality of service and therefore meeting customer needs (Clinton & Wong, 2012). 'Choice' is needed for employees whose job entail having direct contact with customers so they can exercise discretion in making decisions and hence improving the service level accorded to guests (Wirtz, Heracleous & Pangarkaroizo, 2008). These studies demonstrated clearly the correlation between the 'choice' cognition and job satisfaction in the larger hospitality industry and other sectors of the economy. However, none captured the situation in guest houses, a sector whose running is predominated by owner managers who call shots in decision making.

Low cadre hospitality establishments, which comprise of small hotels, restaurants and guest houses, are important accommodation providers offering limited services and products as compared to the classified hotels. Additionally, while they offer an opportunity for small and medium scale investors to provide accommodation services to guests (Kivuva, Kihima & Nzioka, 2014), this goes a long way to contribute to the local economy (Ramukumba and Ferreira, 2016). It was therefore imperative to determine whether 'choice cognition will have any influence on job satisfaction among guest house supervisors in the county of Mombasa.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design seeks to look at individuals in order to describe, compare, contrast, classify, analyse and interpret the entities and the events that constitute their various fields of inquiry (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The study was carried out in Mombasa County. This county is found at the coastal strip of Kenya. The County lies on the shores of the Indian Ocean located on the South Eastern part of Kenya (4⁰03'S 39⁰40'E / 4.050⁰S 39.667⁰E). The county is divided into four divisions: Mombasa island/Mvita (14.1 km²), Changamwe (54.5 km²), Likoni (51.3 km²) and Kisauni (109.7 km²). The weather averages temperatures of 84°F (29°C) and 79% humidity. The target population for this study was supervisors in all the guest houses in Mombasa County. At the time of this study, 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 in-charge of various operations in their respective establishments. The study utilized a census. A self-administered semi-structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The study adopted the Spreitzer's Psychological Empowerment (PE) and Herzberg's Job Satisfaction (JS) Scales. These scales have been tested in the past and found to be reliable. To establish the influence of the independent variable, that is, the choice cognition of psychological empowerment on job satisfaction (dependent variable), Pearson correlation analysis was done. Further, a linear regression model was done to ascertain the level of significance the independent variable had on the dependent variable. To concretize regression, ANOVA was done to establish whether the regression model was significantly predicting the outcome.

Findings

The 'choice' dimension of psychological empowerment statements were computed using descriptive statistics as summarized in Table 1.1. About 46.7% of the respondents (n=98) recorded neutral results on whether they had significant autonomy in determining how to do their job and while 6.7% disagreed on having autonomy. Only 46.7% of the respondents indicated that they had autonomy in making decisions at the work place. This implied that more than half of respondents (53.4%) felt that they did not have adequate autonomy in decision making in their work roles. A mean of 3.47 and standard deviation of 0.720 was in support of this. Another 43.4% of the respondents (n=94) opined that they decided on their own how to go about doing their work as supported by a mean score of 3.23 and standard deviation of 0.992, with 20% disagreeing and 36.7% undecided. This implied that 56.7% indicated that they did not decide on their own on how to go about their work activities. A further 43.3% (n=91) were neutral on whether they had considerable opportunity for independence and freedom when doing their jobs, with 40% agreeing and 16.7% disagreed. This implied that 60% of the respondents felt that there was little opportunity for independence and freedom in discharging their duties. A mean score of 3.27 and standard deviation of 1.027 was in support of this. The 'choice' psychological empowerment had an average mean score of 3.32. Majority of the respondents disagreed that they had significant autonomy in determining how their job was done, making own decisions, and whether they had considerable opportunity for independence and freedom doing their job.

Table 1.1: Descriptive Statistics of ‘Choice’ Cognition of Psychological Empowerment

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Mean	SD
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%		
My autonomy is significant in determining how I do my job	14	6.7	28	13.3	77	36.7	77	36.7	14	6.7	3.47	.720
I decide on my own how to go about doing my work	14	6.7	28	13.3	77	36.7	77	36.7	14	6.7	3.23	.992
I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job	14	6.7	21	10.0	91	43.3	63	30.0	21	10.0	3.27	1.000
Overall mean											3.32	.795

The choice cognition of psychological empowerment indicates the autonomy over the initiation and continuation of work behaviour and processes. As such, this aspect regarded guest house supervisors’ choice of how they did their jobs, decisions on how they did it and opportunities for independence and freedom in deciding how they did it. The results of this study indicated that the respondents disagreed on having autonomy of decision making with a mean value of 3.32 in a scale of 1 to 5. From this it can implied that supervisors of the guest houses had unsatisfactory authority of determining their job, making decisions and using personal initiation in their jobs. This consequently would affect the quality of service delivered to the customers as there would be slower responses in service recovery efforts. In establishing the level of job satisfaction, the MSQ questionnaire items were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The mean value for job satisfaction was found to be 3.52 within a scale of 1 to 5; with a standard deviation of 0.479. This implied that guest house supervisors’ job satisfaction was just above average; hence, a lot of efforts were needed to achieve total job satisfaction.

The relationship between the cognition of ‘choice’ of psychological empowerment and job satisfaction was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient as shown in Table 1.2. The results indicated a positive influence of the choice dimension of psychological empowerment on job satisfaction ($r = .734, p < 0.05$). These results indicated that there existed a strong linear relationship between ‘choice’ and job satisfaction of guest house supervisors. This implied that the more the ‘choice’ tenet of psychological empowerment was implemented the more job satisfaction of supervisors of guest houses was enhanced.

Table 1.2: Correlations of ‘Choice’ Psychological Empowerment and Job Satisfaction

		Job satisfaction	Choice
Job satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Choice	Pearson Correlation	.734**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

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

b. Listwise N=210

The findings of this study indicated that the cognition of ‘choice’ strongly influenced job satisfaction. These results were in agreement with Ponton (2011) in his study of the Australian hospitality industry where he posited that the more ‘autonomy’ granted to employees the more they felt satisfied with their jobs. Further, the results of the current study were in line with the findings by Tsai, *et al.* (2013) who in their study in Taiwanese hotels found low levels of ‘decision making’ empowerment, which in turn had led to low job satisfaction. Further, the current study concurred with Sut and Chad (2011) who argued that Chinese hotel managers were using empowerment to grant workers autonomy and authority to solve work problems by themselves. These actions had fostered job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and eventually had ensured low turnover intention among these hospitality employees. Hsiang-Fei, *et al.* (2014) in their study on empowering hospitality employees in China also posited that employees who possessed autonomy in performing their duties were more satisfied with their jobs. The same applied to the findings by Buitendach & Hlalele (2005) who found a correlation of a large effect between the cognition of ‘choice’ and job satisfaction among engineers in a petrochemical industry in South Africa and Mohsen (2014) who found a high correlation between ‘choice’ and job satisfaction among Egyptian employees in the hospitality industry. Locally, the results of the current study were in line with Gachunga, *et al.* (2016) who posited a positive relationship between the cognition of choice and job satisfaction among civil servants working in public organizations in the education sector. Therefore, this research strongly supported that the choice cognition of psychological empowerment was a significant determinant of guest house supervisors’ job satisfaction in Mombasa County.

To explore further whether there was significant relationship between the ‘choice’ dimension of psychological empowerment and job satisfaction of guest house supervisors in Mombasa County, a linear regression model was utilized. ‘Choice’ was used to predict job satisfaction of guest house supervisors as summarized in Table 1.3. From the model, ($R^2 = .538$) showed that the predictor accounted for 53.8% 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 model caused adjusted R^2 to change from zero to .538 and this change gave rise to an F- ratio of 242.61, which was significant at a probability of .05.

Table 1.3: Model Summary of ‘Choice’ Tenet of 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	.734 ^a	.538	.536	.28951	.538	242.606	1	208	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Choice

Further, ANOVA was utilized 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 to predict the job satisfaction of guest house supervisors. The F- ratio was 242.61 ($P < .05$) and thus the model was significant. As such the null hypothesis that there was no significant relationship between the ‘choice’ 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 ‘choice’ cognition of psychological empowerment and job satisfaction was adopted.

Table 1.4: ANOVA of ‘Choice’ Tenet of Psychological Empowerment

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20.335	1	20.335	242.606	.000 ^b
	Residual	17.434	208	.084		
	Total	37.769	209			

a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), Choice

In addition, the β coefficient for the independent variable ‘choice’ 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 ‘choice’ tenet of psychological empowerment was making a significant contribution to the model. Table 1.5 shows the estimates of β -value and the contribution of ‘choice’ psychological empowerment as a predictor to the model.

Table 1.5: Coefficients of ‘Choice’ Psychological Empowerment

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>T</i>	Sig.	Correlations		
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part
1	(Constant)	1.919	.111		17.269	.000			
	Choice	.503	.032	.734	15.576	.000	.734	.734	.734

a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

b.

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

$$Y = 1.919 + .503X + \varepsilon$$

Where: Y = job satisfaction, X = ‘choice’ psychological empowerment, ε = error term

From the findings the *t*-test associated with β -values was significant and the ‘choice’ 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 ($\beta_1 = 0.503$, $P < 0.05$). This meant that the study rejected the null hypothesis. The findings indicated that for each unit increase in the ‘choice’ cognition of psychological empowerment, there was 0.503 units increase in job satisfaction of guest house supervisors. This implied that the more autonomy and authority in making decisions was granted to guest house supervisors the more they felt satisfied with their jobs.

The current study findings concurred with Karthik, Priyanko and Puiwa (2014) in their survey of 365 frontline employees of a chain restaurant in the USA about leader empowering behaviors and employee psychological empowerment. They posited that the major methods that psychological empowerment could be realized were through trusting and allowing workers to make decisions concerning their work activities. They further indicated that this had a significant influence on employees feeling satisfied with their work roles. Therefore, the current study supported that it was of utmost importance for management of guest houses to grant their employees autonomy of making work related decisions which not only would improve their job satisfaction but also enhance customer service delivery, organizational performance and decrease intentions of leaving.

Conclusion

The study findings revealed that ‘choice’ had a positive influence on guest house supervisors’ job satisfaction. The two variables had a strong linear relationship. This implied that the more guest houses gave their supervisors autonomy to make decisions about how to do their jobs, the more their job satisfaction was enhanced. This is due to the importance of autonomy of supervision in their work. The more they perceive that they have the authority to make decisions the more they will be satisfied with their work roles. In light of this results, this study recommends that guest house supervisors should be given enough freedom and authority to make decisions concerning their day to day work roles. This would enhance their perception of autonomy in decision making concerning their work activities. This would go a great length in enhancing the ‘choice’ tenet of psychological empowerment and ultimately job satisfaction. This would be helpful in improving time management, self esteem among supervisors and service recovery in cases of service failure. The study further recommends that the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, through the various organizations under it; for example, KTB, KAHC and PERAK should enlighten their memberships on creation of strategies of ensuring employee autonomy in performing their work roles. Future studies should seek to establish why guest house owners do not empower their staff to run their enterprises with minimal supervision.

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