

Can Hospitality Industry Organisations Boost Employee Engagement by Improving its Climate?

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Abstract: Can hospitality industry organisations boost employee engagement by improving its climates? To answer this question, one hundred and fifty three (153) employees of Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort, Abakaliki, were surveyed using a structured questionnaire; to determine the relationship between three dimensions of organisational climate (namely; participatory, flexibility, and performance feedback) and employee engagement. Results of Pearson Product Moment Correlation, which was used to test the hypotheses of the study, show that both participatory climate ($r = 0.620$, $p < 0.05$) and performance feedback climate ($r = 0.472$, $p < 0.05$) have significant positive relationships with employee engagement. However, there is a non-significant positive relationship between flexibility and employee engagement ($r = 0.112$, $p > 0.05$). These results imply that improvements in participatory and performance feedback dimensions of organisational climate can boost employee engagement in Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort, Abakaliki. There should, therefore, be deliberate effort to develop and implement policies that enhance employee participation in decision-making, and to ensure regular and objective employee performance feedback, in order to boost employee engagement.

Keywords: Organisational Climate, Employee Engagement, Hospitality Industry, Performance Feedback, Climate Dimensions.

INTRODUCTION

Though organisational climate has gained popularity as a management concept, it is still rather misunderstood (Berberoglu, 2018; Schneider et al., 2017; Adeyemo et al., 2015; Schneider et al., 2013). During the revolution of the 1930s, it was seen that the best way to understand employees' work behaviours was to look at it in relation to the environmental context or climate the behaviours are exhibited in. In 1939, Lewin, Lippitt and Whyte carried out a study on the reason for aggressive behaviour amongst juvenile males, and it was in that study that the concept of "social climate" became pronounced (Lewin et al. in Hai et al., 2022). After Lewin et al.'s contributions to the development of literature on the

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concept of social climate, Litwin and Stringer's 1968 work advanced the concept of social climate to "organisational climate", and identified two important factors in the understanding of climate. First, they opine that organisational climate affects workers' behaviour on the job, and workers' behaviour affects organisational outcomes; thereby linking organisational climate to employees' engagement (Bakker et al., 2022; Bryson et al., 2017; Anderson et al., 2014). Secondly, Litwin and Stringer report that organisational climates are realities, and that these realities are a function of the perceptions of employees of the organisation. Therefore, employees must be allowed to leverage on the climate within their organisations in making psychological decisions of whether to get deeply engaged in organisational roles, or to withdraw when the feeling around the organisation is not so conducive (Adenike, 2011).

Organisational climate has, over the years, conceptually evolved and received attention in management literature. Patterson et al., (2005) conducted a study that validated organisational climate scale. The scale measures seventeen dimensions of organisational climate and grouped into four quadrants namely; "Human Relations Quadrant: Autonomy, Integration, Involvement, Supervisory Support, Training, and Welfare; Internal Process Quadrant: Formalization, and Tradition; Open Systems Quadrant: Innovation or Flexibility, Outward Focus, and Reflexivity; and Rational Goal Quadrant: Clarity of Organisational Goals, Efficiency, Effort, Performance Feedback, Pressure to Produce and Quality" (Patterson et al., 2005:44). The extent to which an employee engages in assigned task(s) would largely depend on any, or a combination, of these factors. In effect, organisational climate refers to the entire atmosphere of the organisation, which embraces employee behaviours, values, traditions, beliefs, methods of accomplishing tasks, etc., that affect interactions and activities in an organisation (Kim & Park, 2020; Bin Ahmad et al., 2018; Shobaki et al., 2018).

Organisational climate, as a concept, generally represents all the various perceptions employees have of their organisation. This could easily portend conflicts and inconsistencies in its operationalisation, especially when climate is viewed as the shared perceptions about an organisation's events and, employees' practices and procedures (Pradoto et al., 2022; Kim & Park, 2020). These perceptions are basically descriptive in nature, and are neither affective nor evaluative. A much better way to look at organisational climate would be to see it from the psychological angle (Hai et al., 2022; Goetz & Wald, 2022; Anderson et al., 2020; Ghavifekr & Pillai, 2016). At the level of individual analysis, organisational climate could be seen as the "psychological climate" because it represents the various ways that subsisting workplace environment are "cognitively appraised and represented in terms of their meaning to, and significance for individual employees" (Fischer & Riedl, 2022).

An issue concerning organisational climate, however, relates to the issue of what should constitute the unit of analysis; majority of existing empirical studies used aggregate units of analysis like work groups, departments, or organisations (Goetz & Wald, 2022; Andersson et al., 2020; Kim & Park, 2020; Bin Ahmad et al., 2018; Maamari & Majdalani, 2017; Ghavifekr & Pillai, 2016). An approach has been to construct aggregates for individual opinions that represent, or are seen as the best levels, and then use the mean of those aggregates as representative of the organisation's climate. The rationale for this approach is that organisational groups have their peculiar climates, which can be identified from the display of significant variations in climates between units/departments and significant consensus in perceptions within units/departments (Maamari & Majdalani, 2017; James & Meyer, 2012).

To this effect, most contemporary studies on organisational climate focus on aggregate scores of individuals rather than on the psychological climate (Manning, 2020; Prasad et al., 2020; Ko & Kang, 2019; Moslehpour et al., 2019; Mutonyi et al., 2019; Hung et al., 2018). For this study, we describe the development of a measure of climate at the organisational level, using constructs from extant literature, such as participatory climate (i.e. a climate that permits employees to be involved in organisational

decision-making), flexibility climate (i.e. a climate that is more inclined towards an orientation of change), and the performance feedback climate (i.e. a climate that measures the feedback of the job performance of its employees).

Another issue relates to lack of consensus on what constitutes the dimensions of organisational climates. There are both theoretical and disciplinary differences as to what make up climate within an organisation. The bulk of these differences appear in discussions on the distinctions between organisational climate and organisational culture (Schneider et al., 2017, 2013). For instance, these two phenomena have often been used interchangeably; studies (such as Han et al., 2015) used items from the organisational climate questionnaire to form constructs for their studies on organisational culture. Fundamentally, the variables that measure organisational climate are also critical elements of organisational culture, and are incorporated in its definitions (Salas-Vallina et al., 2022; Fischer & Riedl, 2022; Mutonyi et al., 2019). Organisational culture reflects the patterns that exist among employees in an organisation, while organisational climate is more behaviourally oriented; it is easy to recognize climates for creativity, innovativeness, safety, or service, within a work-setting. These climates are reflections of employees' perceptions of the policies, practices, and procedures of the organisation, as well as the different forms of interfaces and behaviours that enhance ingenuity, flexibility, innovativeness, safety, or service in the organisation (Powell et al., 2021; Schneider et al., 2017).

Employee engagement is relatively new in management literature. Kahn (1990:694 in Ni et al., 2022) provided the first clear understanding of what he called 'personnel engagement' as "harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances". This opinion clearly shows that employee engagement is not only physical, but mental and emotional; and places it as a collage of commitment and effort (Tang et al., 2015; Zumrah & Boyle, 2015). In the context of this case organisation, Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort, employee engagement would require it's employees to show physical strength in conducting activities within the organisation; mental brilliance in the level of discretionary actions that may be required in serving guests on the spot; and emotional intensity in caring for the needs of very distraught customers (Barreiro & Treglown, 2020; Ismail et al., 2019; Shuck et al., 2017). Proactive engagement of workers in their job roles can be directly affected by the climatic factors prevalent in the organisation. In Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort, for instance, it can be safely assumed that workers would engage poorly if its climate is unsupportive of employee engagement. Supportive climate encourages and deepens employee participation in decision-making, flexibility, and consistent performance feedback to employees (Pandita & Ray, 2018; Jena et al., 2017; Zumrah & Boyle, 2015); these are the dimensions of interest in this study and supported by Patterson (2005).

Having stated the possibility of organisational climatic conditions influencing employees' engagement in Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort, it is also apt to point out that when the organisation does not involve employees in making decisions that affect them at work, its workers may gradually slip into varying levels of psychological withdrawal from work-related activities, which would, in turn, hamper its overall performance. Furthermore, creative workers expect the firm to be flexible with its rules in order to accommodate potential mistakes and losses that may emanate from, say, the creative process. A hostile climate that punishes such mistakes and losses tend to provoke workers' resentment and reluctance to use their own initiatives to "push the extra-mile" at achieving set targets. Another issue that Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort faces is inconsistent performance feedback to its employees, especially positive feedbacks. For instance, workers expect to be encouraged when they work well and meet their targets, but when this does not happen, they may become discouraged and their level of engagement will decline. From the

foregoing, it is obvious that the climate within Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort may negatively or positively affect the intensity of its employees' engagement in their job activities.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Organisational climate

Organisational climate can be studied at both individual and organisational levels. At the individual level, it is known as the psychological climate and it captures an employee's perception of the work environment, i.e. individual's perception of the structures, processes, and events that occur in the organisation. At the organisational level, it is the aggregate of an organisation's employees' psychological climate (Chaudhary et al., 2017; Chaudhary & Rangnekar, 2016). It is the entirety of the social and environmental systems within which employees operate, such as their values, beliefs, behaviours, culture, etc., which may affect the way they interact and perform their jobs in the organisation (Chaudhary, 2014; Chaudhary et al., 2014).

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is an easily recognised phenomenon, but a hard-to-define concept. Engagement entails people applying themselves physically, mentally, and emotionally on their jobs (Shrotryia & Dhanda, 2019; Uddin et al., 2018). Mentally, employee engagement implies employees' trust in the firm, management team, and leaders, as well as working conditions. Emotionally, it reflects how organisational members feel about their workplace, managers, and organisational leaders; which could be positive or negative. As for the physical dimension, it concerns the energies exacted by individuals to effectively carry out their work roles (Men et al., 2020; Shrotryia & Dhanda, 2019; Uddin et al., 2018). Joe et al. (2017) lists the measures of employee engagement to include the extent to which employees are willing to really push themselves to reach challenging work goals; prepared to fully devote themselves to performing their job duties; excited when thinking about new ways to more effectively do their jobs; enthusiastic about providing a high quality product or service; willingness to "go the extra mile" in order to do their jobs well; the extent to which employees feel that improving their performance is important; how they value their jobs; and how determined they are at completing and remaining thorough in all their duties.

Theoretical leaning

This study is rooted in Fredrick Hertzberg's 1959 two-factor theory of motivation. Originally aimed at explaining employee attitude and motivation, the two-factor theory opines that employees' behaviour at the workplace is hinged on two separate factors namely; motivators and hygiene factors. Adequate levels of hygiene factors may lead to the absence of job dissatisfaction (but does not cause satisfaction or motivation); while the absence or inadequate levels of hygiene factors can make workers to experience job dissatisfaction. These factors include: employee pay; social relations with leaders, colleagues and subordinates; conditions of work; firm administrative policies; job security; job status; and supervision (Hur, 2017; Sanjeev & Surya, 2016). They help to reduce distastefulness at work and to prevent bias towards the affairs of employees, and to foster employee engagement. Motivators, on its part, are factors intrinsic to the job, e.g. recognition, responsibility, and meaningful and challenging work roles. In their absence, workers tend to be neutral toward work, but their presence make workers to be highly motivated and satisfied (Hur, 2017).

The relevance of this theory to the assessment of the relationship between organisational climate and employee engagement is that when employees perceive a highly conducive climate in the organisation (in this case, Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort); climate that supports employee involvement in decision-making, flexibility, and fair performance feedback (which are also intrinsic factors), they will display

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satisfaction by increasing engagement in their work roles, which would result to superior outcomes. Otherwise, they become dissatisfied and less engaged in their work roles, leading to poor outcomes.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Based on the theoretical background presented above, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H₁: There is a significant positive relationship between participatory climate and employee engagement in Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort, Abakaliki.

H₂: There is a significant positive relationship between flexibility climate and the level of employee engagement in Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort, Abakaliki.

H₃: Performance feedback climate has a significant positive relationship with employee engagement in Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort, Abakaliki.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Respondents: The population of the study is one hundred and fifty-three (153) employees of Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort, Abakaliki, comprising eighteen (18) top management staff, forty-two (42) supervisory staff, and ninety-three (93) junior employees that range from chefs, waiters, securities, janitors, porters, entertainers and DJs.

Research instrument: A twenty-nine (29) item questionnaire was designed and administered directly on the employees of Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort, Abakaliki. The instrument is divided into three main sections namely; Section A: (demographics); Section B: dimensions of organisational climate (subdivided into participatory climate, flexibility climate, and performance feedback climate subscales). The items in these subscales are adapted from scales prepared by (Olsson et al., 2019) and are modified to suit our climate and the study area as well. Section C contains a total of six (6) items that are used to assess the levels of employee engagement amongst the employees of Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort.

Validation of research instrument: Since the instrument for this study is adapted from similar studies, and modified to suit the area and population for this study, it is therefore expected that the instrument will be valid. However, in order to ensure that it is valid for our setting, the instrument was subjected to face, construct and content validity. Construct validity was ensured by adapting the constructs from extant literature.

Reliability of research instrument: Reliability was determined using alpha test to ascertain internal consistency. The internal reliability analysis conducted on the instrument of the study (using Statistical Package for Social Sciences –SPSS, v 20) yielded Cronbach's alpha of 0.763 for participatory climate, 0.892 for flexibility climate, 0.886 for performance climate, and 0.948 for employee engagement. All these alphas are considered good indicators of the reliability of the instrument.

Research design: The study employs a correlation survey research design in order to determine the relationship between organisational climate and employee engagement which is the main purpose of the study.

Method of data analysis: Data sets for each of the constructs of organisational climate (participatory climate, flexibility climate, and performance feedback climate) were isolated and correlated against the data for employee engagement. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the hypotheses via Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0.

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RESULTS

1. From the correlation matrix below, results of the analyses show as follows: (i) significant positive relationship between participatory climate and employee engagement ($r = 0.620$; $p < 0.05$; $n = 139$); (ii) non-significant positive relationship between flexibility climate and employee engagement ($r = 0.112$; $p > 0.05$ (0.188); $n = 139$); and (iii) significant positive relationship between performance feedback climate and employees' engagement ($r = 0.472$; $p < 0.05$; $n = 139$).

Results of correlation

Table 32: Correlation Matrix										
		Employeeengage	Participatory	Flexibility	Perfeedback	Qualification	Age	Gender	Position	Lenghtofserv
Employeeengage	Pearson Correlation	1								
	Sig. (2-tailed)									
	N	139								
Participatory	Pearson Correlation	.620**	1							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000								
	N	139	139							
Flexibility	Pearson Correlation	.112	.042	1						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.188	.622							
	N	139	139	139						
Perfeedback	Pearson Correlation	.472**	.809**	.075	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.381						
	N	139	139	139	139					
Qualification	Pearson Correlation	-.020	.057	.076	-.021	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.813	.509	.371	.805					
	N	139	139	139	139	139				
Age	Pearson Correlation	.112	-.021	-.061	-.067	-.130	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.188	.808	.478	.436	.127				
	N	139	139	139	139	139	139			
Gender	Pearson Correlation	.020	-.040	.096	.062	.030	-.055	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.813	.639	.260	.467	.730	.521			
	N	139	139	139	139	139	139	139		
Position	Pearson Correlation	.099	.000	.029	-.028	.451**	.156	-.036	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.247	.999	.734	.739	.000	.067	.672		
	N	139	139	139	139	139	139	139	139	
Lenghtofserv	Pearson Correlation	.023	.021	-.027	.009	.195*	-.031	-.337**	.683**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.791	.807	.751	.916	.022	.716	.000	.000	
	N	139	139	139	139	139	139	139	139	139

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

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

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Result of the test of hypothesis one (H_1) reveals that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between a participatory climate and employee engagement. This finding is consistent with the studies of Knight et al., (2017) and Gahlawat & Kundu (2019). The implications of this finding is that a climate that is participatory, i.e. that allows employees to take part in decision-making, particularly decisions that affects them, will enjoy more engagement from the employees. In order words, the more employees of Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort are allowed to participate in decision-making, the higher their levels of engagement.

Test of the second hypothesis (H_2) shows that though there is a positive relationship between flexibility climate and the level of employee engagement in Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort, Abakaliki, that relationship is not statistically significant. The implication of this finding is that a flexible climate, i.e. a climate that allows employees to use their initiatives in carrying out their duties, may not significantly make them to be more engaged. In order words, increase in the level of flexibility that Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort allows its employees would positively, but not significantly, affect their level of engagement (Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020; Ugargol & Patrick, 2018). This result may derive from the nature of

operations in the hospitality industry, especially hotels, which are amenable to high levels of standardisation and bureaucracy, which gives little room for employees' experimentation or personal initiatives.

Finally, result of the third hypothesis (H_3) shows that there is a significant positive relationship between performance feedback climate and employee engagement. The implication of this finding is that a climate where there is regular performance feedback, i.e. that regularly allows employees to know how well they are performing, will stimulate greater employee engagement. In order words, the more employees of Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort are given regular feedback on their performances; the higher their levels of engagement will be (Gruman & Saks, 2011; Mone et al., 2011).

The significant positive results of the tests of H_1 and H_3 are consistent with, and may have been influenced by, the socio-political and cultural realities of the Igbo society. Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort is located in Abakaliki, in Southeast Nigeria, and is predominantly staffed by Igbo people who are widely known to be republican and egalitarian by nature (Okwuosa et al., 2021; Onwuatiegwu, 2020; Okoli, 2020). These attributes are amenable to and, in fact, demand climate that strongly supports participation and performance feedback; which in turn, convey a sense of belongingness that stimulates participants' committed engagement to achieving common goals.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that organisations can boost employee engagement by improving on its climate. This conclusion derives from the findings presented above, which suggest that improving the level of employee participation in decision-making and maintaining effective performance feedback system would improve employee engagement. This conclusion is specifically with regards to Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort, Abakaliki, but may also be applicable to other organisations that share similar characteristics.

Managerial implications

The implications of the findings of this study are, first, organisations should consistently involve its employees in policy formulation, job design, and in developing corrective and disciplinary measures, etc., as a way of boosting employee engagement. This is because non-involvement of employees in making decisions that affect the organisation would engender a corresponding decrease in their level of physical, mental, and emotional efforts for the organisation.

Second, performance management should be a key function for the management of organisations. Employees' job performance should be regularly assessed and evaluated based on their job requirements and timely feedback provided by supervisors, managers and human resource department. Quality performance should be reinforced in order to encourage repeat performance, while poor performance should be corrected and/or reprimanded in order to discourage repeat of such performance. Such a responsive climate will encourage the attainment of adequate levels of employee engagement, and discourages indolence in the workplace.

Finally, although (as suggested by the result of test of H_1 of this study), management may not have to think so much about developing a flexible work environment for employees in a bid to improve their engagement on the job (because it is not statistically significant), the result do show that there is a positive relationship between both variables. However, in spite of the high levels of standardisation prevalent in the hospitality industry; human interactions, especially in such environments, are capable of springing limitless situations that may not have been adequately anticipated by existing rules and regulations, and would require employee initiatives to deal with it. The organisation should, therefore, endeavour to improve on flexibility so as to benefit from the potential ingenuity and innovativeness that may result

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from supporting employees to sensibly exercise their initiatives in carrying out their job roles, when necessary.

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