

Hotel Employment in Kenya; Contingent Work or Professional Career?

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Abstract

While hospitality is a great industry, it presents ample opportunities as well as many challenges. The most successful worker must have positive attitude and energy in addition being naturally friendly and service-oriented. In Kenya, tourism is a major industry and a key driver towards the Vision 2030. It has made major contributions toward the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), over the past few years and has thus contributed towards the economic development of the country. Large number of international travelers come to this country and embarks on adventure safaris, which helps in generating revenue for the country. Tourism has also helped in providing employment to a large number of people in Kenya. The hotel industry has also flourished because of this reason. A large number of hotels are regularly coming up over here to provide accommodation to the tourists visiting here for a holiday. Tourism generates revenues of nearly \$500million per year. The purpose of this study was therefore to evaluate and assess employment as well as career growth in this industry. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Simple random sampling method was used to pick respondents for this study. Subjects for this study included 493 non-management employees working on permanent basis in the selected hotels. This study therefore involved a total of 133 permanently employed staff working in these star-rated hotels. Data from the respondents were collected using both structured and unstructured questionnaires. Descriptive statistical tools such as means, standard deviations ratios, percentiles and correlations were used to present the study findings. The results indicated that majority of workers in hotel jobs in Kenya (51%) had diploma certificate while 33% studied up to secondary level (Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education) without any post secondary qualification. The study further established that, only 10% were degrees holders and only 5% had post graduate qualifications. The results also indicated that training, experience, age, promotion and the hotel star-rate were key factors in determining the length of stay in hotel job or moving to other unrelated careers. The study therefore recommended that, the management to look into the employee welfare such as salary among others to motivate them. The study further recommended the improvement of working

conditions in the hotels to boost employees' morale. These were recognized as the ingredients to employee commitment to the organization and establishment of employee's career growth in the industry.

Keywords: Vision 2030, Gross Domestic Product, Service-oriented, Customer service

Background Information

The tourism and hospitality industries are among the fast expanding industries in the world and are important top foreign earners for Kenya, (Kenya Vision 2030). Beside this, tourism activities are one of the six key drivers for achievement of the economic vision. Kenya is endowed with rich faunal and floral biodiversity characterised by a myriad of terrestrial and marine plant and wildlife, natural and physical scenic features, and a growing diversity in the social-cultural heritage of the people. To date conventional tourism has dominated the tourism sector in the region. However, the demand on land for agricultural use and other development activities is rising threatening the future sustainability of tourism resources.

The quality of tourism and hospitality jobs has been questioned due to the low skills profile of the jobs. According to Guerrier (1999) the assumptions of tourism and hospitality jobs being unskilled or semi-skilled may be attributable to the circular logic used rather than empirical measurement of the skills content required of tourism and hospitality jobs. Guerrier (1999) concludes that, if a job has low status in society and it is done by low status people, it is assumed that it must require little skill. According to Wood (1995), there is no career structure for most of hotels employees and that their jobs are perceived as dead end, making them less likely to attract long stay recruits. Meier (1991) also notes that, if a hotel employee stays in the job and moves into management levels, he/she can expect to experience more difficulties within the workplace. In the same context, Wood (1995) notes that, hospitality industry had been perceived as a 'pass through industry' where many of its workers had been passing through on their way to other careers.

According to Baum (1996) and Wood (1995), tourism and hospitality employment have resulted to hotel jobs being regarded as low status jobs with low payments and poor working conditions. This is further attributed to the traditional importance and irreplaceable role of personal service. Taylor (2002) suggests that customers yearn for that personal touch and humane encounters with the employees during service. These have resulted to the industry having higher amount of human capital invested than it is in other industries. Managers in the hospitality industry value practical and operational skills as well as on-job training, which may be acquired easily within the workplace (ILO, 2001) Therefore formal qualifications from new entrants is not highly regarded within the hospitality industry. Contrary to the above observation, a large proportion of tourism and hospitality employees are workers with formal educational backgrounds while others are part time students and those regarded as contingent workers (Hjalager and Anderson, 2001).

According to Bull (1995), tourism and hospitality industry is known to be labor intensive. Labor intensity however varies according to the type and stage of tourism and hospitality development, infrastructural development, level and type of establishment (Erbes, 1973; Kusluvan 2003). These authors also note that, the service delivery (service encounter) and the late adoption of technology resulted to frequent labor turnover in the hospitality and tourism across the world.

Recruitment by itself cannot overcome the problem of high turnover. However, it provides an understanding of labor markets, in the same way as in promoting products and services. Labor markets have a number of characteristics, including their size, technological complexity, elasticity, pay levels, geographical distribution and status.

Nankervis et al (1996) suggest that, the need to train or imparting of new skills and attitudes has become a daily aspect of each individual's working life. In some cases, this may merely be an upgrading process, but in others, it will require a complete change from one occupation to another. In some sectors of the hospitality industry, staff training is steadily becoming more effective. A number of hospitality organizations have initiated integrated employee benefit programs to assist in the management of labor turnover.

However, the generally high wastage still reduces the effectiveness of the training effort, although companies such as several of the branded fast food operators cope well with the challenge of high turnover. They do this by using extremely well-thought –out and well-supervised training programmes. Thus, Nankervis et al (1996) conclude that, where training is conducted, employees feel motivated and this reduces the labor turnover. Plans that accommodate only the employers' needs may result in dissatisfaction, frustration, low morale and high turnover. The senior management must therefore ensure that adequate plans and resources exist to recruit, motivate, train, develop, obtain commitment from and retain its existing and future management.

In Kenya, hotel employments lack a regulatory body that defines job structure and remuneration policy however one is trained (ILO, 2001). This has impacted negatively in hotel business sustainability due to high costs of training new employees, replacement and separation for the departing employees as well as affecting customer satisfaction. The ILO (2001) report further indicates that, majority of hotel workers had diploma certificate while thirty three percent studied up to secondary level (Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education) without any post secondary qualification. The study further established that, only ten percent were degrees holders and only five percent had post graduate qualifications. This confirmed the study by Riley (1996), that about two thirds or 64 percent of jobs in the hotels, restaurants and catering sector were either unskilled or semiskilled. The nature of hotels employment with working odd hours, working in shifts and the social stigma of working in the hotels curtailed many females in joining the industry (Taylor, 2002). As a result, hotels jobs favored male employees than their female counterparts this sector of the economy.

Lastly, the industry structure, seasonality for hotel jobs, lack of government regulatory framework and ease of entrance in hotel business enterprise among others, make this very sensitive to social and economic changes. According to Bull (1995), these factors were observed to either motivate or de-motivate workers in the hospitality industry in Europe.

Summary

From the review of the literature as well as other related studies that have been conducted on the area, employments in hotel industry has been regarded as a bridge to other forms of employments. Workers as well as the employers do not recognize the great professionalism that customers yearn for during the service encounter.

Research Methodology

The study used descriptive survey research design. It determines and reports the way things are in describing the possible behavior, attitude, values and characteristics of the respondents while using questionnaires as the appropriate too. In this case, close ended and open ended questionnaires were used to provide a representative sample from the large population of non-management hotel employees in this study. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) however define survey research design as an attempt to collect data from an identified population in order to establish the current status of the population in respect to one or more variables.

The independent variables for this study were gender, age, level of education, training, duration in employment and hotel star-rate. As explained by Babbie and Mounon (2001), Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), these variables are totally free to vary by themselves and do not co-vary with other variables. The dependent variable used in this study was job change measured in percentage over the rate at which the respondents moved from one job to another. Job change as the variable is presumed to be influenced by variations of conditions of the independent variables that present themselves in the work environment.

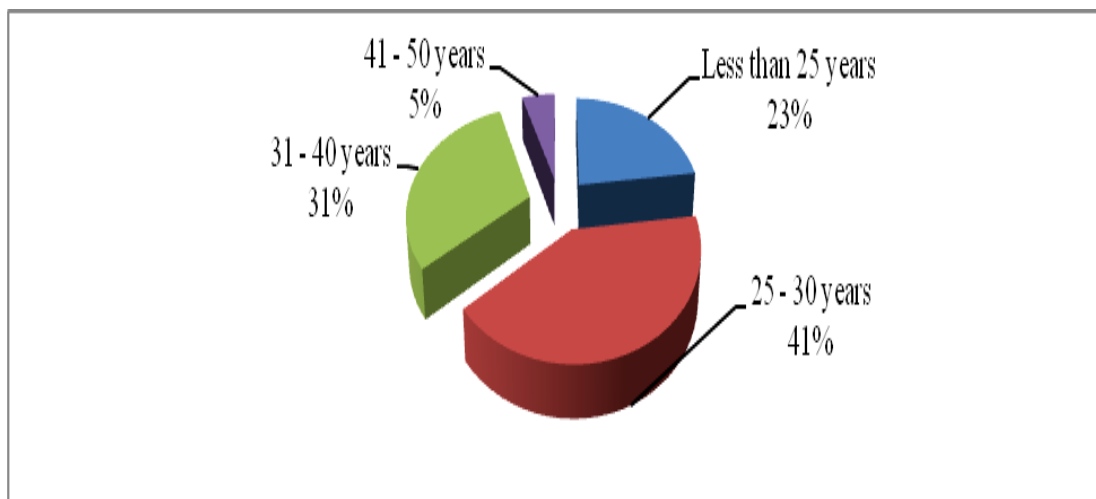
Findings of the study

The study established that, gender was a key factor in employees working in the hotels. The nature of hotels employment with working odd hours, working in shifts and the social stigma of working in the hotels curtailed many females in joining the industry (Taylor, 2002). As a result, hotels jobs favored male employees than their female counterparts. Subsequently, the male managers in both set of hotels under the study were twice the number of their female counterpart while a similar trend was observed with non-management employees.

Table 1: Gender distribution of subjects in the study

	Gender		TOTAL
	Male	Female	
HR Managers	11	5	16
Non-management	81	43	134
Respondents in the 3-star-rated hotels	41	26	67
Respondents in the 5-star-rated hotels	45	22	67

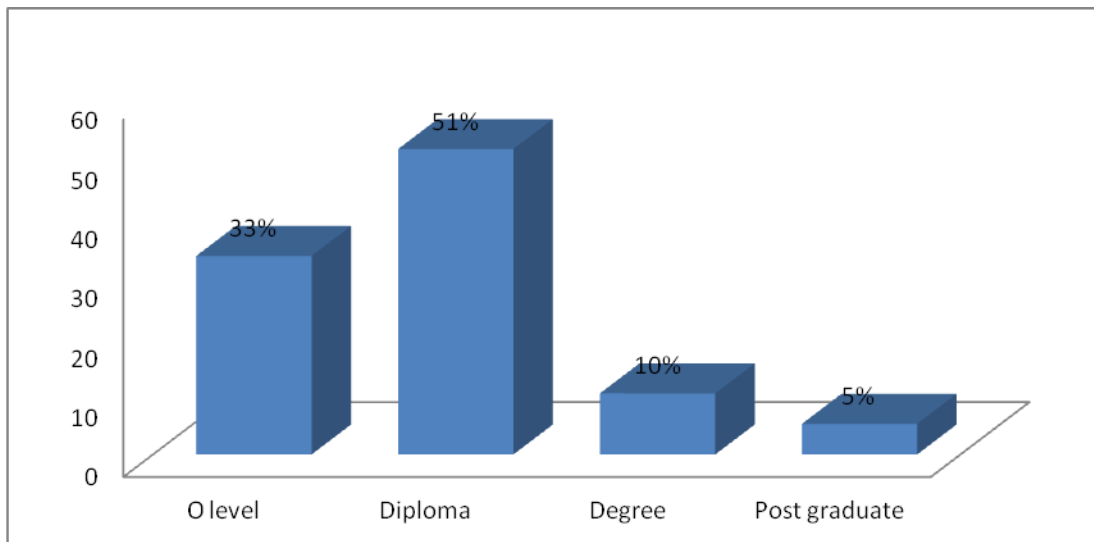
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Figure 1: Age distribution of subjects in the study

Results in figure 1 above indicate that forty one percent of the respondents; both male and female were in the age bracket of 25 to 30 years followed by thirty one percent in the age bracket of between 31 – 40 years. The figure also shows that twenty three percent of the respondents were less than 25 years old and only five percent were over 40 years old. According to Lucas (1995) and the ILO report (2001), young people in their first employments had greater expectations from the current jobs and whenever such expectations are not realized within a period of less than six months, they resign to look for better opportunities.

The level of education was also a key in taking up hotel jobs. The findings of the study were presented in Figure 2 below.

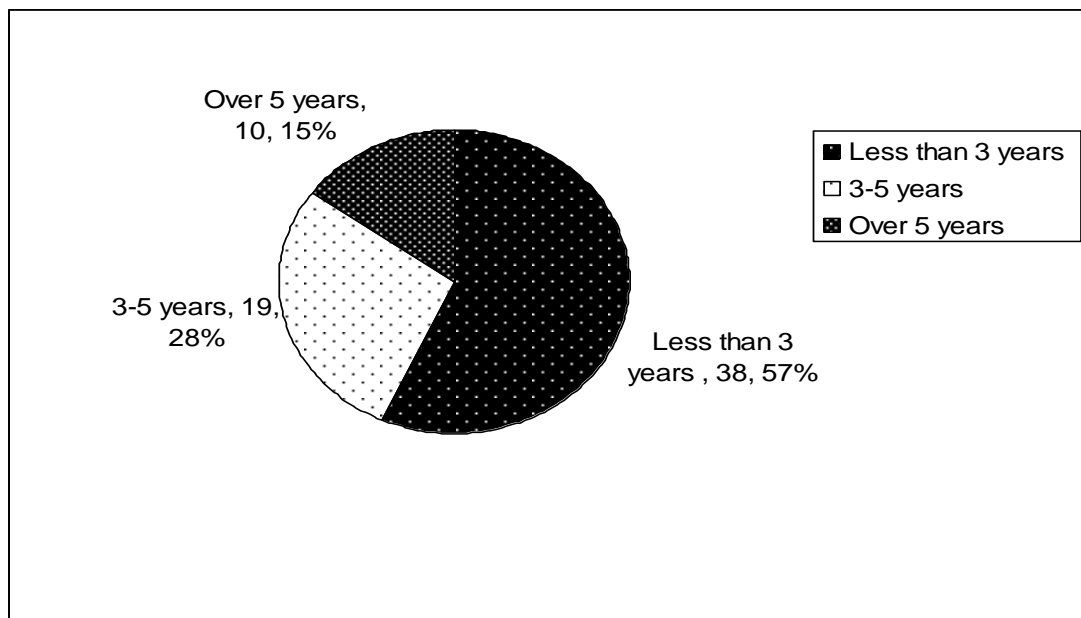
Figure 2: Demographic characteristics of the employees by level of education



The results in figure 4.2 show that, majority of the respondents (fifty one percent), had diploma certificate while thirty three percent studied up to secondary level (Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education) without any post secondary qualification. The study further established that, only ten percent were degrees holders and only five percent had post graduate qualifications. This confirmed the study by Riley (1996), that about two thirds or 64 percent of jobs in the hotels, restaurants and catering sector were either unskilled or semiskilled. According to Baum (1996) and Wood (1995), jobs in the hospitality industry are regarded as low status jobs with low payments and poor working conditions. He further attributes to the traditional importance and irreplaceable role of personal service rather than the formal training that the person has.

Employees' length of stay was also key factor to determine the continuity in working in hotel jobs. The results are as in the figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Duration of employment in hotels jobs



The study results indicated that 38 or fifty seven percent of the respondents had been in the current employment for a period less than three years. The results also showed that nineteen or twenty eight percent of the respondents had been working in the same hotels for a period between three and five years and ten or fifteen percent had been in the three star-rated hotels for a period over five years. According to these results, majority of the employees would not stay long up to the retirement age. This confirms the findings of Wood (1995) that, there is no career structure for most of hotels employees and that their jobs are perceived as dead end, making them less likely to attract long stay recruits. Meier (1991) also notes that, if a hotel employee stays in the job and moves into management levels, he/she can expect to experience more difficulties within the workplace. In the same context, Wood (1995) notes that, hospitality industry had been perceived as a 'pass through industry' where many of its workers had been passing through on their way to other careers.

According to Mobley (1977), factors such as added responsibilities, staff training, performance and evaluation as well as the company's succession plans have been suggested to reduce labor mobility in the hospitality industry.

Variable prediction and their association

In order to determine the strength of relationships between the various variables and job change in hotels, the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated and result shown as below.

Table 2 Variables matrix and their correlation

Correlations

		Work experience	Changed job	Age	Gender
Work experience	Pearson Correlation	1	-.652**	.867**	-.084
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.337
	N	134	134	134	134
Changed job	Pearson Correlation	-.652**	1	-.693**	-.065
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.457
	N	134	134	134	134
Age	Pearson Correlation	.867**	-.693**	1	-.107
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.219
	N	134	134	134	134
Gender	Pearson Correlation	-.084	-.065	-.107	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.337	.457	.219	
	N	134	134	134	134

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

The study findings indicate a strong positive correlation; $r(133) = -.652, .867, p < .01$. A significant linear relation exists between age and changing of jobs. Younger people tended to change jobs within the first few years of their employment while gender was not a factor in deciding to change a job. The younger people from both genders were observed to change jobs compared to the older people with many years in one job. In this context, Wood (1995) noted that, young people intrinsically transient and therefore keen on looking for new jobs that would satisfy their ambitions.

Conclusions

These findings concurred with Gupta and Shaw (2001) that pay is the most critical outcome of organizational membership for employees to stay on. Respondents described their salaries as poor, a pointer to their dissatisfaction with the employers therefore constantly looking for greener pastures. The unconducive work conditions resulted to the employees developing work related stress and reduced employees' organizational commitment. This was evident where few hotels, if any had employees who worked to their retirement. Reigel (1995) asserts that, labor turnover can be desirable in some instances, especially when pay is linked to length

of tenure. As a result, this study observed the hotel jobs served the employee on transient to other industries.

According to the study, thirty five percent of the respondents did not receive training which enabled them to do their jobs well. Hence, were dissatisfied with their jobs and low morale among them. This perhaps also resulted to the employees looking for jobs elsewhere.

It was equally evident from the findings of the study that, the management did not treat well their employees, as respondents described them as inflexible and they did not balance work and personal life of the employees as they had to for long hours. This resulted to sixty percent of the respondents to indicate that they would not recommend others to work for the organization. According to the study, majority of the respondents did not know whether they utilized their abilities and skills.

It was also evident that, poor working conditions were worse as compared to other industries, perhaps the dislike of hotel employments. More so, the insensitivity and little concerns on the management of the employees' welfare and balancing of personal life was a reason to turning over. Respondents indicated that they had to work for long hours while receiving little pay which could not commensurate with the amount of work done. This lowered the employee motivation as they were not rewarded according to the amount of work they would do.

According to Mobley (1977), factors such as added responsibilities, staff training, performance and evaluation as well as the company's succession plans are suggested to reduce labor in the hospitality industry. Subsequently, low labor turnover rates have positive effects on the profitability of any organization (Phyllis, 1990).

Recommendations from the Study

The Employees' satisfaction surveys help the management to identify satisfaction gaps that need to be dealt with, tactfully by the human resource manager at the early stage of the occurrences. The study therefore recommended that, the management to look into the employee welfare such as salary among others to motivate them. The study further recommended the improvement of working conditions in the hotels to boost employees' morale. These were recognized as the ingredients to employee commitment to the organization.

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