

EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT IN SERVICE RECOVERY AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN KENYA

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Abstract

The increased competition in the hospitality industry has forced hotel proprietors to continuously search for competitive advantages, with service quality being the single most important differentiating factor in the hospitality industry. This competition and perpetual differences between the customers and the service providers leading to service failures, service recovery is an important strategy to reduce the dissonance with customers. In Kenya the hospitality industry has been characterized by poor service quality which threatens their long-term survival. This study used a survey approach guided by cross-sectional research design. The study was guided by compensation as the independent variable and customer loyalty as the dependent variable. The study found out that compensation has a significant influence on customer loyalty.

The study recommended that since service failure is inevitable in the hospitality industry, proprietors should come up with strategies to encourage customers to voice their complaints and use such information as a learning tool for improving service quality and also create a set of knowledge that will be used for continuous innovation and strategic growth of their enterprises.

Keywords: Employee empowerment, Customer Loyalty, Hospitality, Service failure, Service Quality, Service Recovery

INTRODUCTION

In today's global marketplace, competition among service providers is fierce and service firms constantly struggle to build and manage high-quality customer relationships, which has heightened the need for organizations to become more entrepreneurial in order to survive and prosper (Shapiro & Nieman-Gonder, 2006). As the tourism and hospitality industry becomes more competitive, it becomes more difficult to meet the expectations of customers due to marketing problems resulting mainly from the intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity, and perishability characteristics of services (Karatepe, Avci, & Tekinkus, 2005).

This increased competition and expansion of unique services and amenities in the hospitality industry has forced proprietors to continuously search for competitive advantages, with service quality being the single most important differentiating factor in almost every hospitality environment (Neill & Palmer, 2004). Service quality is an important determinant of customer satisfaction and the prices that customers are willing to pay, with managing service quality increasingly being viewed as critical by most commercial enterprises in achieving market differentiation and competitive advantage (La & Kandampully, 2004). Creating loyal customers through delivery of superior service quality and customer satisfaction is of paramount importance to the success of service firms (Karatepe, Avci, & Tekinkus, 2005). One of the factors of service quality is human element of service delivery and includes aspects such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and service recovery (Sureshchandar, Rajendran, & Kamalanabhan, 2001).

Service recovery should not be viewed solely as a damage control mechanism that affects only the shop floor level of a firm, but also as part of the firm's long-term strategic planning that aims to ensure that its offerings are continuously innovated so that the firm continues to remain at the forefront of the marketplace (La & Kandampully, 2004). Firms must strive to design appropriate recovery strategies in order to remain competitive. Currently, service recovery is no longer conceived as a set of specific, one-off actions in response to an unsatisfied consumer, or as an operational mechanism of damage control, but as an integral

part of the service company's long-term strategy which involves comprehensive management practices (Johnston & Michel, 2008). Effective service recovery minimizes the impact of service failures, and can potentially transform angry and frustrated customers into satisfied and loyal ones (Boshoff, 1997).

Adopting a strategic perspective on service failure management is potentially more beneficial for service providers in the long term, because it can contribute to a firm's learning at the organizational level and to the development of a customer value-based competitive advantage (La & Kandampully, 2004). Firms need to identify a well-balanced combination of exploitation and exploration strategies (Prange & Schlegelmilch, 2009). Excessive exploration at the expense of exploitation can be costly, as the tangible outcomes of exploration will only be realized in the distant future and then only with considerable uncertainty. On the other hand, a concentration on exploitation without exploration discourages the organization from pursuing learning and development (Auh & Menguc, 2005).

The primary objectives of service recovery are to regain customer satisfaction with service encounters, and to identify and correct weaknesses in the relevant service processes, thus avoiding similar occurrences in the future. Attracting new customer's costs five times more than retaining existing customers and a customer who has had a conflict resolved by a company will tell about five people; if the conflict remains unresolved, dissatisfied customers will tell 10 to 20 people about their bad experience (Thwaites & Williams, 2006). A firm can also learn from its service failures and apply such learning, not only to amend its existing system but also to create a set of knowledge that can be used for continuous innovation and transformational change. The firm can thus be better equipped to provide its customers with better value through a more reliable and continuously updated service system as the market evolves over time. In this regard, learning from service failure should be considered as an integral part of an organization-wide learning strategy, with the ultimate objective being to create a sustainable competitive advantage based on superior customer value. This requires that the service provider adopt a strategic perspective on the management of service failures, in addition to the commitment to organizational learning (La & Kandampully, 2004) .

Statement of the Problem

The total contribution of travel & tourism was KES 403.7bn in 2011 (13.7% of GDP) and KES 448.4bn in 2012 (12.5% of GDP), and this is forecast to rise by 2.2 % in 2013 and to rise by 4.5% per annum over the next decade to KES 714.8bn by 2023 (WTTC, 2013). The hotel bed occupancy has grown over the years with the numbers growing from 14, 711, 600 in 2007; 14, 233, 600 in 2008, 17, 161, 800 9n 2010 and 17, 419, 600 in 2011. However, the actual bed

occupancy is still below 50 % with 2010 registering 38.8% and 2011 registering 40.3% bed occupancy (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

Despite the fact that hospitality industry is among the fast expanding industries and an important top foreign earners for Kenya, it has been characterized with many challenges ranging from service quality, which includes service failure, and the number of accommodation facilities. With the ever-increasing competitive business environment, customers choices have widened and more than ever customers are less likely of forgiving for service failures (Roodurmun & Juwaheer, 2010). However, mistakes are an unavoidable feature of all human endeavors and the unique characteristics of the service industry, especially the hotel industry, makes mistakes more distinct and zero defects not attainable (Wirtz & Mattila, 2004).

Service failure causes customer dissatisfaction with the service provider which may lead to loss of customers and a spread of negative word-of-mouth (Kim, Kim, & Kim, 2009). If allowed to continue, poor service delivery threatens the long-term survival of the firm (Michel & Meuter, 2008). This would lead to the closure of hotels, loss of jobs and hence low Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which will lead the country failure to service recurrent expenditure, capital expenditures and internal and external debts. This will lower the country competitiveness which will lower the rate of innovation as a result of lower entrepreneurial orientation.

Several local studies have been done on the area of service quality, service recovery, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Odera, Chepkwony, Korir, Lagat, and Mumbo (2012) conducted a study on the effects of distributive justice complaints resolution strategies on customer satisfaction in Kenya's banking industry. Komunda, (2012) investigated the effects of service recovery on customer satisfaction and loyalty in a commercial banking environment. Auka (2012) conducted a study on service quality, satisfaction, perceived value and loyalty among customers in commercial banking. Mage (2010) conducted a study on empirical estimation of customer loyalty in tourism industry and developed a model that can be used in estimating customer loyalty. This indicates that there are limited local empirical studies on the effect of employee empowerment in service recovery on customer loyalty in the hospitality industry. This study sought to fill in on this existing knowledge gap.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service Recovery

Service industries are undergoing significant developments with focus shifting from customer acquisition to customer retention; and it is vital that organizations not only attract new customers and satisfy their immediate needs, but also do their utmost to retain them as this will probably give them a greater chance of survival. Building relationships with customers lies in the fact that

repeat business not only promotes profitability, it can actually be the lifeblood of the organization (Steyn, Mostert, De Meyer, & Van Rensburg, 2011).

Increasingly, service firms as well as their customers, are seeking a flawless performance on delivery of both core and supplementary service elements, although due to human errors, service failure is inevitable from time to time, especially in medium and high contact services such as hospitality industry services (Mattila & Cranage, 2005). No matter what level of excellence of service a company delivers, many companies will often make the mistake when trying to meet the expectations of today's customers, who are more demanding and less loyal than ever before. Even the most customer-oriented organization with the tightest quality assurance program is not able to eliminate all service failures (Del Río-Lanza, Vázquez-Casielles, & Díaz-Martín, 2009). Service recovery is a valuable marketing tool which constitutes a second chance for the hotel to satisfy the customer (Kuenzel & Katsaris, 2009).

Service recovery helps to solve problems in two potential situations; during the service encounter, before a customer complaint and shortly after the service encounter if the customer is dissatisfied (Gronroos, 2007). Immediate recovery after the failure ensures that the company will have a good image or reputation (Wirtz & Mattila, 2004). However, even with these potential benefits, service recovery often fails because of unresolved tensions that arise from the conflicts among perspectives relating to customer recovery, process recovery and employee recovery (Michel, Bowen, & Johnston, 2009).

Service recovery does not guarantee that the failure has been completely dealt with and will not recur (Schoefer & Ennew, 2005). Recent research warns that the rate of failures has not improved and that service recovery management still fails too often (Michel, Bowen, & Johnston, 2009). Despite the efforts and precautions a company may take to avoid errors or breakdowns during service delivery, failures are at one time or another bound to occur (Seawright, Bell, Preston, & Hoopes, 2008). Currently, service recovery is no longer conceived as a set of specific, one-off actions in response to an unsatisfied consumer, or as an operational mechanism of damage control, but as an integral part of the service company's long-term strategy which involves comprehensive management practices (Smith, Karwan, & Markland, 2009). An integrated approach to service recovery gives the organization a new opportunity to maintain dissatisfied clients, recover employees and learn, and hence to prevent or reduce the likelihood of future errors (Michel, Bowen, & Johnston, 2009).

Service failure causes customer dissatisfaction with the service provider, and due to that customers may exit silently, spread a negative word-of-mouth, voice their complaints to the operator, or continue to patronage the same service provider despite their dissatisfaction (Kim, Kim, & Kim, 2009). Service errors have an impact on end-user perception and can affect

satisfaction/dissatisfaction levels (Michel & Meuter, 2008). However, effective service failure management, and a timely solution can restore customer satisfaction (Hocutt, Bowers, & Donavan, 2006; Varela, Vazquez, & Iglesias, 2008). By not effectively offering service recovery after service failures, customers could be let down for the second time, leading to customers leaving the organization for a competitor, spreading negative word-of-mouth communication about the organization, or rating the organization lower than it would have done directly following the service failure (Lewis & McCann, 2004).

Lewis & McCann (2004) identified service recovery strategies and classified them as: apology; correction; empathy; compensation; follow-up; acknowledgement; explanation; exceptional treatment; and managerial intervention. Service recovery's major importance is owed to the fact that it affects customer satisfaction and, as a consequence, customer loyalty (Kuenzel & Katsaris, 2009). Satisfaction with the service recovery directly affects a customer's intention to repurchase and to recommend the service provider (Lewis & McCann, 2004). These relationships constitute the vital reasons why providers pay so much attention to service recovery because in financial terms loyal customers can increase profits including through their recommendation of the service to others (Kuenzel & Katsaris, 2009). When service failures have occurred, service recovery is the primary way a firm can retain its customers and minimize the costs associated with customer defection (Seawright, Bell, Preston, & Hoopes, 2008).

Employee Empowerment

Since front-line employees account for as much as 65 percent of complaint initiation, they are vital to the timelines of service recovery strategies (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2003). Employee empowerment refers to the extent to which the employee who first receives the complaint is able to solve the problem, and does not have to solicit the help of someone else to do so (Boshoff, 2005). Employee empowerment refers to the authority for an employee to present a solution that meets the needs and expectations of the individual customer; which means giving frontline employees the desire, skills, tools, and authority to serve the customer. The empowerment of the employees requires that they are able to understand and manage failure, as well as customer expectations of appropriate recovery actions (Bhandari, Tsarenko, & Polonsky, 2007).

Due to their relative position in the process of service recovery, front-line employee's appropriate actions can prevent small problems from becoming bigger problems. Empowerment of front-line service workers must come with knowledge and the ability to effectively deal with service failures (Robinson Jr, Neeley, & Williamson, 2011). They must be able to identify service failures and have the authority to solve them when they happen (Jong & Ruyter, 2004). A

likelihood of successful service recovery could be increased if the initial worker contacted after failure has appropriate authority and handled the complaint in a timely manner (Robinson Jr, Neeley, & Williamson, 2011). Responsibility has to be backed up with appropriate training in how to recover the service, which encourages employees in their work and gives them confidence to use the discretion they have received appropriately (Santos-Vijande, Diaz-Martin, Suarez-Alvarez, & Del Rio-Lanza, 2013).

Empowering employees to fix problems in real time may lead to different service recovery solutions for any given case depending on which person is dealing with it, hence diminishing recovery justice (Michel, Bowen, & Johnston, 2009). It is thus advisable to set up clearly formalized service recovery policies and procedures, even if this is to the detriment of the employee's decision-making capacity (Smith, Karwan, & Markland, 2009). There should be a proper combination of employee empowerment and training to develop successful recovery strategies, which will contribute to employee satisfaction after the failure since it is the employee who can make decisions to rectify the process and to compensate the client immediately if necessary, and thus alleviate the tensions that arise from dealing with service recovery (Santos-Vijande, Diaz-Martin, Suarez-Alvarez, & Del Rio-Lanza, 2013).

The response speed which refers to the speed of reaction at which complaints are resolved is also important in dealing with service failure because it enhances the prospect of positive evaluation by the customer of how they are treated by the firm (Donavan, Brown, & Mowen, 2004). In order to be effective and efficient, real time contextual information can be a key to success in dealing with the circumstances. Front-line employees should have a unique perspective of the situation that can be used as an advantage when deciding how to respond (Robinson Jr, Neeley, & Williamson, 2011). Rapid identification of a problem, even before the client is aware of it, will only be fruitful if the firm responds rapidly; and if possible by the first person who is contacted (Boshoff, 1997). In order for the front-line employee to be more effective and immediate in dealing with unpredictability, they should possess the aptitude to adapt to real-time situations, with one of the key elements of being adaptive is having a sufficient knowledge base of customer information (Jong & Ruyter, 2004). The speed of problem handling has been identified as an important dimension of procedural justice (Bhandari, Tsarenko, & Polonsky, 2007).

METHODOLOGY

This study was guided by positivism approach which is an epistemological position that advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond. It describes the research task as entailing the collection of data upon which to base

generalizable propositions that can be tested. The connection between theory and research carry with them the implication that it is possible to collect observations in a manner that is not influenced by pre-existing theories (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

This study used a survey approach that was guided by a cross-sectional research design. The accessible population of this study was customers who patronize five star hotels in Kenya. Specifically the study collected data from customers who were residing in the hotels. The hospitality industry setting was chosen for two reasons. First, hospitality settings provided a familiar context for the respondents. Second, prior research has documented that service failures and recovery occur frequently within the hospitality industry (Smith & Bolton, 2002).

The study collected data from all the five star hotels and lodges in Kenya. There are 17 five star hotels and lodges in Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 2003). The sample size was computed using Fischer's (1998) formula ($n=Z^2pq/d^2$), where:

n	=	Sample size
Z	=	1.96, that is the value of Z corresponding to the 95% confidence level
p	=	0.5 (50%)
q	=	1-p (1-0.5=0.5)
d	=	0.05 (5% error margin)

This gave a sample size of 384 respondents. The respondents were drawn from the five star hotels and were selected using simple random sampling. Mburu, Van Zyl, and Cullen (2013) in their study on the determinants of customer satisfaction in the Kenyan banking industry used Fischer's (1988) formula in computing their sample. This study used a self designed questionnaire as the data collection instrument. The study used drop and pick method where the questionnaires were delivered at each of the hotels reception and then collected later. A total of 361 questionnaires which was a response rate of 94.5% were found to be appropriate and adequate for data analysis.

The study used a cross-sectional survey comprising structured scale items and open-ended questions. Scale items were measured on the standard seven-point, Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (7).

This study used the internal consistency method to test the reliability of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha (α) was used to ensure that items have reasonably good internal consistency and measure the same underlying construct consistently. The normality of the data was tested using Skewness and Kurtosis test. Factor analysis was conducted on all the constructs to determine the ones that will be regressed against the dependent variable. Prior to the extraction of factors, the Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and

Bartlett's test of sphericity was conducted to confirm whether there is a significant correlation among the variables to warrant the application of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) (Narteh, 2013).

Research Hypothesis: Employee empowerment in service recovery has no significant influence on customer loyalty in the hospitality industry in Kenya.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The study found out that majority (51%) of the respondents were female, while a few (49%) were male which indicates that the hospitality industry targets and attracts customers from all genders. The study also found out that majority (70%) of the respondents were aged between 21 and 30 years, 28% were between 31 and 40 years, and a few (2%) were below 20 years of age. This could be attributed to the fact that this population might have a higher disposable income to spend in high end hotels or the older generation was not willing to fill in the questionnaires. Majority (51%) of the respondents had a Bachelor's degree, 23% had a Master's degree, 22% had a diploma, while a few (2%) had tertiary and O-level.

The normality of data distribution was assessed by examining its skewness and kurtosis, with the absolute values of standardized skew or kurtosis indices used to assess the linearity of the variables (Kline, 2005). A variable with an absolute skew-index value greater than 3.0 is described as extremely skewed, and a kurtosis index greater than 8.0 is categorised as extreme kurtosis (Kline, 2005). The values of skewness and kurtosis of variables ranged from absolute values of 0.044 to 0.708 and from absolute values of 1.0 to 1.461 respectively. This implies that the assumption of normality for this study was satisfied. The study also tested for reliability which was found to be a Cronbach's alpha of 0.816. Reliability of 0.7 is typically employed as the rule of the thumb to denote an acceptable level of internal reliability (Pallant, 2010).

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with AMOS software was used for the data analysis using a two-phase process consisting of confirmatory measurement model and confirmatory measurement model as suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). The test model was subjected to a maximum-likelihood confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to achieve minimization. Prior to the extraction of factors, the Bartlett test of sphericity and the Kaiser Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy were tested. The KMO statistic value was found to be 0.868, with Bartlett test of sphericity indicating a chi-square of 10254.535 with an associated p-value of 0.000. These results are considered good for adequate sample sizes and thus factor analysis was found to be appropriate for the study.

Employee empowerment was measured by 7 items. Based on the analysis, one item was dropped at a time and then CFA was re-run on the subsequent model. Following the above

procedures, three items were deleted. The eventual fit indices indicated a perfect fit of the model to the data. Hence, the four indicator model provides evidence of a good fit (table 1).

Table 1: Fit Indices for Employee Empowerment

The fit Index	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	CFI
Default model	0.042	0.822	0.691	0.900
Saturated Model		1.000		1.000
Independence model	0.355	0.260	0.125	0.000

Key: RMSEA: Root mean square error of the approximation; GFI: Goodness of fit index; AGFI: Adjusted goodness-of-fit; CFI: Comparative fit index

The study used Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) path coefficients to determine the direction and strength of the factor. Regression weights were used to test the contribution of different indicators to employee empowerment. As shown in table 2 a unit increase in employee empowerment is associated with 0.94 increases in employee authority to resolve customer complaints. Since CR (16.282) is greater than 1.96, then there is a significant positive relationship between EE2 and employee empowerment construct. Also a unit increase in employee empowerment is associated with 0.847 increases in employee use of own judgement in resolving customer complaints, and since CR (16.378) is greater than 1.96, then there is a significant positive relationship between EE3 and employee empowerment construct.

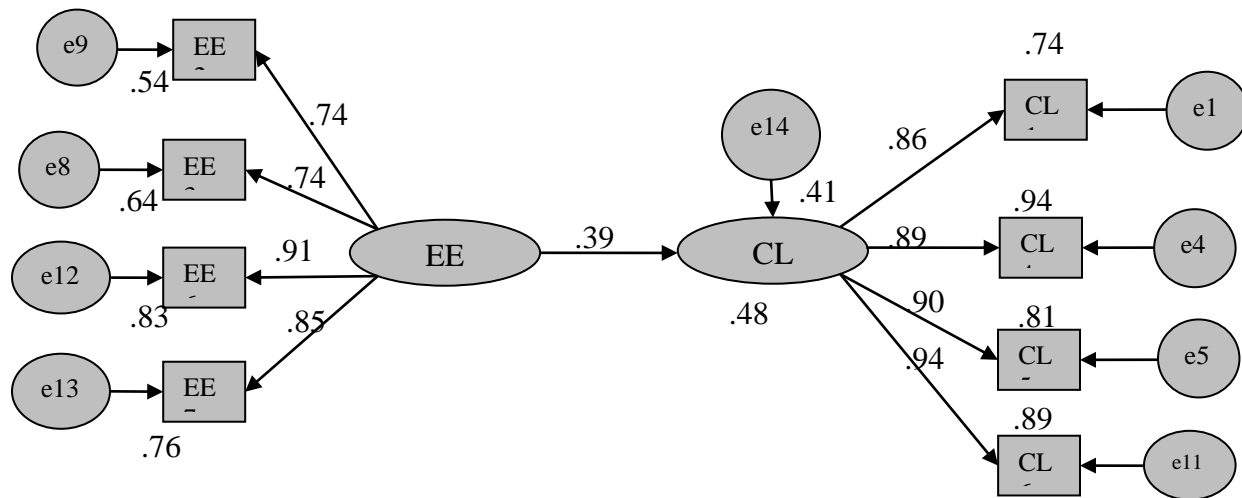
The results also show that a unit increase in employee empowerment is associated with 1.172 increases in the speed of resolving the customer complaints, and since CR (22.924) is greater than 1.96, then there is a significant positive relationship between EE6 and employee empowerment construct. Lastly the results also show that a unit increase in employee empowerment is associated with 1.106 increases in immediacy of response to the failure, and since CR (20.623) is greater than 1.96, then there is a significant positive relationship between EE7 and employee empowerment construct. The overall results also show that a unit increase in customer loyalty is associated with 0.527 increases in employee empowerment. Therefore the results show that there was a significant positive relationship between employee empowerment and customer loyalty.

Table 2: Regression Weight and t-values for employee empowerment

			Estimate	S. E	C. R	P
CL	←----	EE	.527	.054	5.230	***
EE2	←----	EE	.940	.057	16.382	***
EE3	←----	EE	.847	.052	16.378	***
EE6	←----	EE	1.172	.051	22.924	***
EE7	←----	EE	1.106	.054	20.623	***

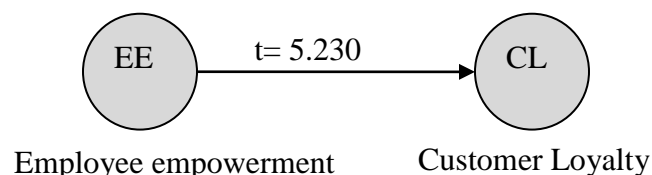
As shown in figure 2 the path coefficient beta value was 0.39. This implies that for every 1 unit increase in employee empowerment, customer loyalty is predicted to increase by 0.39 units. The study also used R^2 to determine the proportion of variation in dependent variable explained by the model. Figure 1 shows that employee empowerment had a coefficient R^2 mean of 0.41, which indicates that 41% of the variations in customer loyalty can be accounted for by employee empowerment.

Figure 1: Structural Equation Modeling for Employee Empowerment



T-statistics value (CR) was used to test whether the relationship between employee empowerment and customer loyalty was significant. To determine the level of significance, the Critical Value (CR) should be greater than 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. Figure 2 shows a t-scale of 5.230, which shows that there was a significant relationship between employee empowerment and customer loyalty since CR(5.230) is greater than the critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 significance level ($p < 0.05$).

Figure 2: Significance Test for the Influence of Employee Empowerment on Customer Loyalty



The findings thus reveal that the relationship between employee empowerment and customer loyalty is positive and significant ($t=2.230$, p -value .026). This implies that an increase in the level

of employee empowerment in service recovery leads to an increase in customer loyalty in the hospitality industry in Kenya. Therefore, the null hypothesis that employee empowerment has no significant influence on customer loyalty in the hospitality industry in Kenya is rejected at 0.05 level of significance. The alternative hypothesis that employee empowerment has a significant influence on customer loyalty in the hospitality industry in Kenya is accepted. These findings agree with Jong and Ruyter (2004) study on adaptive versus proactive behaviour in service recovery, the role of self managing teams which found out that employee must be able to identify service failures and have the authority to solve them when they happen. Entrepreneurs in the hospitality industry should enhance service orientation which is a feature that promotes top-down influences on employee service performance and service quality which will ultimately have an impact on customer satisfaction.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study found out that the path coefficient beta value to be 0.39, which implied that for every 1 unit increase in employee empowerment, customer loyalty is predicted to increase by 0.39 units. The coefficient R^2 mean was found to be 0.41 which indicated that 41% of the variations in customer loyalty can be accounted for by employee empowerment. The t-statistic value was found to be 5.230 which is greater than 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. This implied that an increase in the level of employee empowerment in service recovery leads to an increase in customer loyalty in the hospitality industry.

The results show that the receptionist and waiters/waitress are the first people that are contacted in case of service failure and therefore should be the first people to solve customers' complaints. The frontline employees therefore need to be empowered to be able to solve customer complaints without first referring them to someone else. The likelihood of successful service recovery is increased if the initial contact has the authority and handles customer complaints in a timely manner. Timely response to service failure increases the chances of customer satisfaction and hotels need to give their employees autonomy in order to be able to address customer concerns independent of hotel management. The results also show that hotels in Kenya do not allow their employees to use their own judgement and decision making capacity in handling customer's complaints. This in effect has led to untimely address to customers complaints. These findings agree with Robinson, Neeley and Williamson (2011) study on implementing service recovery through customer relationship management: identifying the antecedents, who found out that frontline employee's appropriate actions, can prevent small problems from becoming bigger problems.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study it can be concluded that service failure is inevitable in the hotel industry from time to time and if allowed to continue can affect the performance of an enterprise. Hotels must therefore come up with service recovery strategies that will not only leave the aggrieved customers satisfied with the outcome but also create a long-term relationship. Failure management achieves a strategic consideration since it involves a profound revision of overall firms operations and the organizational commitment to proactively prevent failures, efficiently recover and learn from mistakes and successfully maintains a long-term relationship (Santos-Vijande, Diaz-Martin, Suarez-Alvarez, & Del Rio-Lanza, 2013).

The importance of employee empowerment in service recovery should also be taken into consideration. Hotel proprietors should appreciate that front-line employees are the mirror of any organization and the first point for any complaint initiation. Hotels should therefore embark on empowering their employees with skills, knowledge and the ability to deal with service failures. The employees should also be given the autonomy and leeway to make their own judgement as this will determine the speed and authority that they will use in addressing the service failures. There is also a need of empowering the employees with good interpersonal skills that will help them in handling such service failure experiences. Effective communication is also important in any service recovery situation. Hotels should emphasize on the need of their employees communicating effectively during the process of service recovery and also when offering the service. Employees should be able to offer appropriate explanations for the failure and involve the aggrieved customers in reaching the outcome of the service recovery.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Since the study adopted a cross-sectional design, firm conclusions about the directions of causality implied in the model cannot be drawn. Interpretation of models using structural equation modeling is also not proof of causality. True causal inferences can only be drawn by testing models using longitudinal data. This is especially important for a subject like customer loyalty that is not static but is a developmental process that changes over time.

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