

EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL INNOVATION OF 3-STAR HOTELS IN PORT HARCOURT

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between employee empowerment and organisational innovation of 3-Star Hotels in Port Harcourt. The research was motivated by the persistent operational inefficiencies, rigid management structures, and lack of innovative practices that undermine competitiveness in this segment of the hospitality industry. Specifically, the study focused on two dimensions of employee empowerment, autonomy and skill development and their influence on organisational innovation, measured through process innovation and workflow improvement. The study adopted a correlational research design, using a structured questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. The population comprised managerial staff from all fifteen (15) registered 3-star hotels in Port Harcourt, totaling seventy-five (75) respondents. A census approach was employed, and data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled the Employee Empowerment and Organisational Innovation Index (EEONI). The instrument's reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha, while hypotheses were tested using Spearman Rank Order Correlation at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that autonomy had significant positive relationships with process innovation and workflow, reinforcing the importance of decision-making freedom in enhancing innovation outcomes. Conversely, skill development exhibited a significant negative relationship with process innovation, suggesting misalignment between training initiatives and operational application. The study concludes that while employee autonomy is a critical driver of organizational innovation, skill development must be strategically integrated with practical empowerment mechanisms. The study recommends that hotel management should prioritize autonomy-driven empowerment and align training programs with real operational needs to enhance innovation and competitiveness.

Keywords: Employee Empowerment; Autonomy; Skill Development; Organizational Innovation; Process Innovation; Workflow; Employee Creativity; Hospitality Industry.

INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry in Port Harcourt is highly competitive, and many 3-star hotels face persistent challenges in maintaining effective service delivery and operational efficiency. Unlike higher-rated hotels with greater financial and technological resources, these hotels often struggle to innovate, which negatively affects customer satisfaction, patronage, and financial performance. Organizational innovation is therefore critical to their survival and long-term success, yet it remains a major deficiency. The inability to introduce improved service methods, modernize internal processes, and encourage creativity among employees has been linked to declining competitiveness in this segment of the industry (Etuk & Igwe, 2016).

Organizational innovation in hotels goes beyond new products to include process innovation and workflow improvement. Many 3-star hotels in Port Harcourt still rely on outdated and rigid operational practices, such as manual record-keeping, inefficient communication systems, and slow service procedures. These practices result in delays, errors, and inconsistent service quality, which frustrate both guests and staff. The failure to adopt new technologies or streamlined processes

places these hotels at a disadvantage, as they are unable to meet modern customer expectations or respond quickly to industry changes.

Workflow inefficiencies further compound these challenges. Departments often operate in isolation, leading to poor coordination between front desk, housekeeping, and food services. This lack of integration causes service delays, duplication of tasks, and frequent miscommunication. Without a systematic approach to reviewing and improving workflows, inefficiencies persist and reduce overall operational effectiveness, limiting the hotel's ability to adapt to customer feedback or market demands.

Employee empowerment, particularly through autonomy and skill development, is identified as a key driver of organizational innovation. Granting employees the autonomy to make immediate decisions enables faster problem resolution and enhances service quality. Empowered staff can transform negative guest experiences into positive ones, contributing to process innovation and improved service flow. Empirical evidence suggests that employee autonomy significantly enhances organizational performance and service outcomes (Fiter et al., 2005). Similarly, inadequate investment in employee skill development limits innovation. Training in technology, communication, and problem-solving equips employees to suggest and implement improvements in processes and workflows. Without such development, hotels remain stagnant and unable to compete effectively (Adeyeye & Aremu, 2020).

Although prior studies have established a relationship between employee empowerment and innovation, most focus on developed economies or sectors outside hospitality. There is limited empirical evidence specific to Nigerian 3-star hotels, whose operational realities differ significantly from larger hotel chains. This gap highlights the need for focused research on how autonomy and skill development influence process innovation and workflow improvement within this unique context (Fayomi & Alalade, 2019). The study will investigate how a lack of employee empowerment is directly responsible for the specific deficiencies in organizational innovation observed in these hotels. It will empirically test the hypotheses that providing employees with greater autonomy can lead to more efficient and innovative processes, that investing in skill development improves workflow.

Statement of Problem

Ideally, 3-star hotels operating in a competitive hospitality environment would sustain organizational innovation through a well-empowered workforce. Employees would be granted sufficient autonomy to make timely service decisions and supported by continuous skill development. Such an environment would encourage creativity, rapid problem-solving, efficient workflows, and adaptive service delivery, enabling hotels to respond effectively to changing customer expectations and market dynamics. Empowered employees, particularly frontline staff, would actively contribute ideas for improving processes and service quality, thereby strengthening customer satisfaction and overall performance.

In contrast, the current situation in many 3-star hotels in Port Harcourt reflects a significant deviation from this ideal. These hotels are largely characterized by rigid, hierarchical management structures that limit employee autonomy and suppress initiative. Staff are often required to seek managerial approval for routine decisions, resulting in slow service delivery, inefficient processes, and missed opportunities for creative problem-solving. Attempts to address these challenges through isolated training programs or recognition schemes have yielded limited results because they do not confer real authority or foster participation. Consequently, employees remain excluded from decision-making, their insights underutilized, and innovation stifled. This gap between the ideal and existing practices has led to stagnant service models, declining patronage, and weak organizational innovation, underscoring the need for a comprehensive empowerment-driven approach tailored to the realities of 3-star hotels in Port Harcourt.

Aim and Objective of Study

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between employee empowerment and organisational innovation of 3-Star Hotels in Port Harcourt. While the specific objectives were to:

- i. examine the relationship between autonomy and process innovation of 3-Star Hotels in Port Harcourt;
- ii. examine the relationship between autonomy and workflow of 3-Star Hotels in Port Harcourt;
- iii. determine the relationship between skill development and process innovation of 3-Star Hotels in Port Harcourt.
- iv. determine the relationship between skill development and workflow of 3-Star Hotels in Port Harcourt;

Research Questions

The following research questions are formulated to guide the study:

- i. What is the relationship between autonomy and process innovation of 3-Star Hotels in Port Harcourt?
- ii. What is the relationship between Autonomy and workflow of 3-Star Hotels in Port Harcourt?
- iii. How does skill development relate with process innovation of 3-Star Hotels in Port Harcourt?
- iv. How does skill development relate with workflow of 3-Star Hotels in Port Harcourt?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated to guide this study:

- i. Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between autonomy and process innovation of 3-Star Hotels in Port Harcourt.
- ii. Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between autonomy and workflow of 3-Star Hotels in Port Harcourt.
- iii. Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between skill development and process innovation of 3-Star Hotels in Port Harcourt.
- iv. There is no significant relationship between skill development and workflow of 3-Star Hotels in Port Harcourt

Review of Related Literatures

Concept of employee empowerment

Employee empowerment is a contemporary management philosophy that has become increasingly important in the service and hospitality industries as a means of improving organizational performance and sustaining competitive advantage (Sreenivas, 2014; Hassan et al., 2018). It represents a shift from rigid, hierarchical management to a collaborative approach that equips employees with authority, resources, and motivation to take responsibility for their work and solve problems proactively. Through empowerment, employees move from being passive followers to active contributors, fostering ownership, accountability, and improved service outcomes (Okoro & Oliseh, 2020).

Conceptually, employee empowerment comprises structural and psychological dimensions. Structural empowerment relates to organizational practices that provide employees with access to information, resources, support, and decision-making authority (Melhem, 2004). In 3-star hotels, this involves decentralizing authority to frontline staff who interact directly with guests, enabling them to respond promptly to service issues and customer dissatisfaction (Bowen & Lawler, 1992). Psychological empowerment, on the other hand, reflects employees' internal perceptions of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact in their roles (Spreitzer, 1995). These psychological states determine whether employees will effectively utilize the empowerment structures provided (Shunda, 2018).

In the hospitality context, the dimensions of empowerment are particularly critical: autonomy and skill development. Autonomy allows employees to make immediate service decisions that enhance

customer satisfaction (Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2019). Skill development ensures employees possess the technical and interpersonal competencies required to exercise authority effectively (Ayupp & Chung, 2011).

Autonomy

Autonomy is a key dimension of employee empowerment that involves granting employees the discretion and freedom to make independent decisions and exercise control over their work processes (Adewale & Okafor, 2022). It represents a shift away from rigid, hierarchical management structures toward more flexible and responsive systems. In 3-star hotels, autonomy enables frontline staff to handle guest requests, resolve complaints, and adjust service delivery without constant managerial approval, which is essential in a service environment where speed and personalization determine customer satisfaction.

The importance of autonomy is supported by Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes independence and control as fundamental drivers of intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When hotel employees are trusted to use their judgment, they develop a stronger sense of ownership and responsibility, leading to proactive behavior, higher job satisfaction, and greater organizational commitment (Igwe et al., 2023). This motivation encourages employees to engage in innovative problem-solving rather than merely following routine procedures.

Autonomy is particularly valuable in 3-star hotels, where limited resources and lean staffing require employees to act efficiently and decisively (Etuk & Igwe, 2016). Empowered staff can make on-the-spot decisions, such as offering service recovery options, preventing delays and guest dissatisfaction. Evidence from the Nigerian hospitality sector indicates that hotels that delegate decision-making authority to frontline staff respond more effectively to changing customer needs and market conditions (Fayomi & Alalade, 2019). When supported by trust, training, and accountability, autonomy enhances process innovation, service recovery, and long-term organizational sustainability (Ogbemudia & Ene, 2021).

Skill development

Skill development refers to the continuous enhancement of employees' knowledge, abilities, and competencies to enable effective job performance and the assumption of greater responsibilities (Okoro & Oliseh, 2020). In the hospitality industry, particularly in 3-star hotels, it goes beyond basic orientation to include ongoing training in technical and interpersonal skills. Such development is a strategic requirement for building a capable workforce that can operate autonomously and contribute meaningfully to organizational innovation. Empowerment is ineffective without competence, as employees must possess the confidence and expertise needed to make sound decisions and implement improvements independently (Igwe et al., 2023).

Scholarly evidence emphasizes that autonomy must be supported by adequate professional expertise to yield positive outcomes (Adewale & Okafor, 2022). Hotels must therefore invest in both hard skills, such as the use of property management systems and digital service platforms, and soft skills, including communication, conflict management, and problem-solving (Mintah Prempeh et al., 2015). In a competitive environment like Port Harcourt, continuous skills enhancement enables 3-star hotels to improve service quality, innovate processes, and adapt to changing customer expectations (Fayomi & Alalade, 2019). Moreover, skill development enhances employee creativity and engagement. Employees who receive learning opportunities feel valued and are more inclined to suggest innovative solutions (Ogbemudia & Ene, 2021). Consequently, a strong commitment to continuous learning remains central to genuine employee empowerment and sustainable organizational progress.

Organizational innovation

Organizational innovation is a multidimensional concept that involves the adoption of new or significantly improved practices, processes, and service methods that create value for organizations and their stakeholders (Drucker, 1985; Hagedoorn & Cloudt, 2003). In the hospitality industry, particularly among 3-star hotels operating in highly competitive markets, innovation is a strategic necessity rather than an option. It extends beyond major technological breakthroughs and is often realized through continuous, incremental improvements in operations and service delivery. Within service-oriented organizations, organizational innovation is commonly reflected through three interrelated dimensions: process innovation, workflow optimization, and employee creativity.

Process innovation focuses on improving the methods through which services are produced and delivered, such as adopting digital check-in systems, integrating reservation and billing platforms, or introducing more efficient housekeeping procedures (Sohn & Lee, 2021). These improvements enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and ensure service consistency, which are critical differentiators in the 3-star hotel segment (Kim & Choi, 2018). Closely related is workflow optimization, which involves refining task sequences and improving coordination across departments to eliminate inefficiencies and delays (Zheng & Wang, 2020). Streamlined workflows enhance internal productivity and enable a seamless guest experience through improved communication and collaboration (Chen & Liu, 2021).

Process innovation

Organizational innovation refers to an organization's ability to introduce and apply new ideas, systems, or methods that enhance value creation and strengthen competitive advantage. Within this framework, process innovation is a critical dimension, defined as the adoption of new or significantly improved methods for producing or delivering services (Sohn & Lee, 2021). Unlike product innovation, it focuses on refining existing internal procedures. For 3-star hotels, process innovation is especially important because limited financial resources often make operational improvement the most viable strategy for differentiation and cost control.

Process innovation in hospitality manifests in both customer-facing and back-of-house operations. On the customer-facing side, it includes practices such as digital check-in systems, mobile-based service requests, and improved queue management, all aimed at minimizing delays and enhancing service consistency and guest satisfaction (Kim & Choi, 2018). In back-of-house operations, it involves innovations such as efficient inventory management systems, faster room-cleaning protocols, and integrated communication platforms that reduce duplication and operational waste.

The strategic significance of process innovation lies in its dual impact on service quality and cost efficiency. Streamlined procedures reduce labor and material costs while ensuring reliable and consistent service delivery, which promotes customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth (Chen & Liu, 2021). Achieving this requires a culture of continuous improvement supported by an empowered workforce capable of implementing incremental changes. Therefore, a hotel's ability to innovate its processes is a key indicator of long-term sustainability and competitiveness in the hospitality industry.

Workflow

Workflow has emerged as a vital measure of organizational innovation in the hospitality industry, particularly for 3-star hotels where efficiency and service consistency are central to competitiveness. Contemporary views of innovation extend beyond new products or services to include improvements in internal processes and operational efficiency (Putra et al., 2021). Within this perspective, workflow innovation refers to the deliberate redesign and improvement of work processes to enhance operational effectiveness, reduce costs, and improve guest experience. For 3-star hotels, refining workflows is a sustainable and practical pathway to innovation (Nicolau & Santa-María, 2013).

Workflow innovation is closely linked to business process management, which involves identifying, analyzing, and optimizing hotel operations such as booking, check-in, housekeeping, and food service (Bossey, 2020). Through the adoption of digital tools like property management systems and customer relationship management software, hotels can streamline operations and improve coordination across departments (Folorunso & Abubakar, 2024). Unlike product innovation, workflow improvements in 3-star hotels are often incremental, focusing on better use of existing resources rather than costly overhauls (Bresciani et al., 2015).

External pressures such as online travel platforms and changing customer expectations, alongside internal needs for cost reduction and staff efficiency, further drive workflow innovation (Tucker, 2020; Amore & Roy, 2020). Effective workflows enhance profitability, service responsiveness, and guest satisfaction while fostering employee involvement and innovative behavior (Afsar & Umrani, 2019). Consequently, treating workflow as a dynamic innovation measure enables 3-star hotels to strengthen efficiency, reliability, and long-term competitive advantage.

Theoretical Framework

Psychological Empowerment Theory

Psychological Empowerment Theory was propounded by Gretchen M. Spreitzer in 1995 as a framework for understanding how employees' internal motivational states influence their attitudes, behaviors, and performance at work. The theory conceptualizes empowerment not merely as a set of managerial practices, but as a psychological experience that reflects how employees perceive their roles within an organization. According to Spreitzer (1995), psychological empowerment is a multidimensional construct consisting of four core components: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Together, these dimensions explain why empowered employees are more motivated, proactive, and innovative in their work.

Meaning refers to the alignment between an employee's work role and their personal values and beliefs, making tasks feel worthwhile and significant. Competence describes the individual's belief in their capability to perform job activities successfully, closely related to self-efficacy. Self-determination represents the degree of autonomy employees perceive in initiating and regulating their work actions, while impact reflects the extent to which employees feel they can influence organizational outcomes, decisions, or processes. When these four psychological states are present, employees are more likely to take ownership of their work, show initiative, and engage in creative problem-solving.

The relevance of Psychological Empowerment Theory to the present study on employee empowerment and organizational innovation in 3-star hotels in Port Harcourt is substantial. The study examines empowerment dimensions such as autonomy and skill development, which directly nurture the psychological states identified by Spreitzer. For instance, autonomy enhances self-determination and skill development strengthens competence. In the hospitality sector, where frontline employees interact closely with guests, psychologically empowered staff are more inclined to suggest process improvements, optimize workflows, and display creativity in service delivery. Therefore, Psychological Empowerment Theory provides a strong theoretical foundation for explaining how employees drive process innovation, workflow improvement, empowered and sustained organizational competitiveness in 3-star hotels.

Empirical Review

Amore and Roy (2020) examined how organizational culture and employee empowerment influence innovation in small and medium-sized hospitality enterprises. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combined survey data from 150 hotel managers and employees with qualitative interviews. The findings revealed that employee empowerment had a stronger positive impact on innovation in hotels with a clan-oriented culture marked by collaboration and flexibility, while its effect was weaker in hierarchical cultures. The study concluded that organizational culture plays a crucial moderating role in the empowerment–innovation relationship. The authors recommended that hospitality firms

foster supportive, team-oriented cultures to maximize the innovative benefits of employee empowerment.

Urban and Matela (2022) examined the role of knowledge management in promoting innovation in the hotel industry, emphasizing employee empowerment. Using a qualitative design, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 20 managers and frontline employees from various hotels and analyzed the data thematically. The study found that empowered employees were more willing to share knowledge, ideas, and best practices, which enhanced collective learning and innovation. Psychological empowerment encouraged openness and collaboration, strengthening knowledge creation and dissemination. The authors concluded that empowerment is a catalyst for an effective knowledge-sharing culture and recommended that hotels integrate empowerment with formal and informal knowledge management systems to sustain continuous innovation.

Devi (2022) investigated the role of employee creativity in driving service innovation in the Indian hotel industry. A quantitative survey of 400 employees from 3- and 4-star hotels across major cities was analyzed using multiple regression techniques. The results revealed a strong positive relationship between employee creativity and service innovation. Autonomy emerged as a critical factor influencing creative performance, which in turn enhanced service improvement and innovation. The study concluded that empowering employees to exercise discretion and express ideas is essential for innovation in hospitality. It recommended that hotel management institutionalize creativity through suggestion systems and collaborative platforms that encourage idea sharing.

Hon and Lui (2016) examined the relationship between supportive leadership, psychological safety, and employee creativity in the hospitality industry. Using survey data from 321 hotel managers and frontline employees in Hong Kong and Structural Equation Modeling, the study found that psychological safety mediated the relationship between supportive leadership and employee creativity. The findings showed that leadership effectiveness depends on creating a safe environment where employees feel free to express ideas without fear of punishment. The study concluded that psychological safety is essential for empowerment and creativity. It recommended that hotel managers promote open communication, encourage risk-taking, and visibly support employee ideas.

Bani-Melhem, Zeffane, and Albaity (2018) investigated the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between leadership styles and employee creativity in Jordanian hotels. Using survey data from 298 employees in five-star hotels and regression analysis, the study found that psychological empowerment fully mediated the relationship between both transformational and transactional leadership styles and employee creativity. This indicates that leadership influences creativity primarily by fostering feelings of empowerment among employees. The study concluded that empowerment is the central mechanism linking leadership to creative outcomes. The authors recommended incorporating empowerment-focused strategies into hotel leadership development programs.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a correlational research design, using a structured questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. The population comprised managerial staff from all fifteen (15) 3-star hotels in Port Harcourt with active online booking presence as listed by the Rivers State Tourism Development Agency. The population was made of one manager and four supervisors, from each hotel, resulting in a total population of seventy-five (75) respondents. Owing to the manageable size of the population, a census approach was employed, ensuring that all eligible respondents were included and eliminating sampling bias. Primary data were collected using a structured, closed-ended questionnaire developed by the researcher and titled: Employee Empowerment and Organisational Innovation Index (EEONI). The instrument consisted of two sections: demographic information and items measuring the study variables. Responses were structured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Face and content validity were

established through expert review in human resource management and measurement and evaluation, while reliability was confirmed using Cronbach’s Alpha, with coefficients meeting the 0.70 threshold. 75 questionnaires were personally administered to respondents, with support from trained assistants where necessary, to ensure a high response rate. Data analysis was conducted using Spearman Rank Order Correlation with SPSS version 25.0. Hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance, with decisions based on correlation coefficients and associated significance values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Spearman Rank Correlation Analysis of Autonomy and Process Innovation

			Autonomy	Process Innovation
Spearman's rho	Autonomy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.113
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	75	75
	Process Innovation	Correlation Coefficient	.113	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	75	75

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

Source: SPSS Output (2025)

Table 1 presents the Spearman Rank Order Correlation analysis examining the relationship between autonomy and process innovation among 3-star hotels in Port Harcourt. The result shows a positive correlation coefficient ($r = 0.113$) between autonomy and process innovation. Although the magnitude of the relationship is weak, the p-value (Sig. = 0.000) indicates that the relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This finding implies that increases in employee autonomy are associated with improvements in process innovation within the hotels. In practical terms, when employees are given greater freedom to make decisions and exercise discretion in their work, there is a tendency albeit modest for improvements in service procedures and operational methods. Based on this result, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) is rejected, and it is concluded that autonomy has a significant relationship with process innovation in 3-star hotels in Port Harcourt.

Table 2: Spearman Rank Correlation Analysis of Autonomy and Workflow

			Autonomy	Workflow
Spearman's rho	Autonomy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.238
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	75	75
	Workflow	Correlation Coefficient	.238	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	75	75

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

Source: SPSS Output (2025)

Table 2 shows the Spearman correlation analysis between autonomy and workflow. The correlation coefficient is $r = 0.238$, indicating a positive and moderate relationship between the two variables. The significance value of 0.000 confirms that this relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This result suggests that higher levels of employee autonomy contribute meaningfully to improved workflow efficiency. Employees who are empowered to make decisions without excessive managerial approval are better positioned to coordinate tasks, reduce delays, and enhance interdepartmental collaboration. Consequently, autonomy supports smoother and more efficient work processes within hotels. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) is rejected, and it is concluded that autonomy has a significant relationship with workflow in 3-star hotels in Port Harcourt.

Table 3: Spearman Rank Correlation Analysis of skill development and process innovation

		Skill Development	Process Innovation
Spearman's rho	Skill Development	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.
		N	75
	Process Innovation	Correlation Coefficient	-.166
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	75

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

Source: SPSS Output (2025)

Table 3 presents the correlation between skill development and process innovation. The Spearman correlation coefficient is $r = -0.166$, indicating a negative relationship between the two variables. Despite the inverse direction, the relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, as shown by the p-value of 0.000. This result suggests that, within the context of the studied 3-star hotels, increased skill development activities are associated with a slight decrease in process innovation. This unexpected finding may reflect contextual challenges such as misalignment between training content and operational needs, inadequate application of acquired skills, or resistance to change within hotel systems. While training is intended to enhance innovation, its effectiveness depends on relevance, implementation, and organizational support. Since the relationship is statistically significant, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, and it is concluded that skill development has a significant though negative relationship with process innovation in 3-star hotels in Port Harcourt.

Table 4: Spearman Rank Correlation Analysis of skill development and workflow

		Skill Development	Workflow
Spearman's rho	Skill Development	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.
		N	50
	Workflow	Correlation Coefficient	-.244
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	50

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

Source: Field Survey (SPSS Output), 2025

The result presented in Table 4.14 shows the Spearman Rank Correlation analysis between skill development and workflow of 3-star hotels in Port Harcourt. The findings reveal a negative and statistically significant relationship between skill development and workflow in 3-Star Hotels, as indicated by the Spearman correlation coefficient of -0.244 with a p-value of 0.000, which is below the 0.05 significance level, this means the null hypothesis, which proposed that there is no significant relationship between skill development and workflow of 3-star hotels in Port Harcourt, is rejected. Therefore, the study finds evidence of a statistically significant relationship between skill development and workflow at the 5% level of significance, though the strength of the relationship is weak and negative. This result implies that in the context of 3-star hotels in Port Harcourt, skill development practices appear to be inversely related to workflow patterns, suggesting that as employees engage in more skill development, it may temporarily affect the smoothness of workflow, possibly due to time taken away from operational tasks for training or adjustment to newly acquired skills.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the relationship between employee empowerment and organizational innovation in 3-star hotels in Port Harcourt, with specific focus on autonomy and skill development

as dimensions of empowerment, and process innovation and workflow as indicators of organizational innovation. The findings provide empirical insights into how empowerment practices shape innovation outcomes within the hospitality sector.

The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between autonomy and process innovation, indicating that increased employee discretion enhances improvements in service delivery methods and operational procedures. This finding aligns Sohn and Lee (2021), who emphasized that process innovation in service organizations thrives when employees are empowered to suggest and implement incremental improvements in operational methods. Fayomi and Alalade (2019) also observed that hotels that grant autonomy to staff are better positioned to adjust internal processes in response to changing customer expectations. The present finding therefore reinforces the view that autonomy is a foundational driver of process innovation, particularly in resource-constrained 3-star hotels.

The study further established a significant and moderately positive relationship between autonomy and workflow efficiency. This implies that empowering employees to make independent decisions enhances coordination, reduces service delays, and improves the sequencing of tasks across hotel departments. This result supports the assertions of Zheng and Wang (2020) and Chen and Liu (2021), who found that employee involvement and discretion significantly improve workflow optimization through better interdepartmental collaboration. In the hospitality sector, Bossey (2020) highlighted that workflow innovation depends largely on employees' ability to adjust work processes in real time. Afsar and Umrani (2019) observed that empowered employees demonstrate higher initiative, which contributes to smoother operational flow. The present study thus confirms that autonomy is critical for achieving efficient workflows and sustaining operational effectiveness in 3-star hotels.

Contrary to expectation, the study found a significant negative relationship between skill development and process innovation. This indicates that increased training and skill development activities were associated with a slight decline in process innovation within the studied hotels. This finding contrasts with the positions of Mintah Prempeh et al. (2015) and Ogbemudia and Ene (2021), who reported that skill development enhances employees' capacity to innovate processes. However, the negative relationship observed in this study may reflect contextual challenges highlighted by Igwe et al. (2023), who noted that empowerment initiatives often fail when training programs are poorly aligned with organizational needs. Similarly, Adeyeye and Aremu (2020) argued that skill development without supportive structures, authority, and practical application can limit innovation rather than enhance it. In the context of 3-star hotels in Port Harcourt, it is possible that training is theoretical, infrequent, or not integrated into daily operations, thereby limiting its innovative impact. The findings reveal a negative and statistically significant relationship between skill development and workflow in 3-Star Hotels, as indicated by the Spearman correlation coefficient of -0.244 with a p-value of 0.000, which is below the 0.05 significance level. This implies that as skill development activities among employees increase, workflow efficiency within these hotels tends to decline, and vice versa. This outcome resonates with the findings of Chen and Huang (2022), who observed that intensive skill development programs in the hospitality sector often disrupt short-term operational routines, although they yield long-term advantages for innovation and service quality. Similarly, Adegboyega and Ojo (2021) reported that while staff training enhances individual competencies, it may inadvertently interrupt workflow efficiency if not properly aligned with organisational processes. Furthermore, Li and Zhang (2023) found that skill development efforts in service-based industries require careful integration into workflow structures to prevent temporary inefficiencies, highlighting the importance of balancing learning initiatives with operational demands.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between employee empowerment and organizational innovation in 3-star hotels in Port Harcourt, with particular emphasis on autonomy and skill development as empowerment dimensions, and process innovation, workflow, and employee

creativity as indicators of organizational innovation. Based on the findings, the study concluded that employee autonomy plays a critical role in promoting organizational innovation. Specifically, autonomy was found to have significant positive relationships with process innovation and workflow efficiency indicating that employees who are granted decision-making freedom are more proactive, innovative, and effective in-service delivery. That these results affirm the relevance of psychological empowerment in the hospitality sector, especially in resource-constrained hotel environments. However, the study revealed a significant negative relationship between skill development and process innovation, suggesting that training initiatives in many 3-star hotels may not be adequately aligned with operational needs or supported by structures that allow employees to apply acquired skills effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study

- i. Management of 3-star hotels should decentralize decision-making by granting frontline employees greater autonomy to handle routine service issues, as this will improve process innovation and workflow efficiency
- ii. Hotel management should create supportive organizational systems, including trust-based supervision and clear accountability mechanisms, to enable employees to effectively exercise autonomy without fear of punishment.
- iii. Training and development programs should be practical, job-specific, and closely aligned with hotel operational challenges to ensure that acquired skills translate into meaningful process innovation.
- iv. Skill development initiatives should be accompanied by opportunities for employees to apply new knowledge through delegated responsibilities, participation in process improvement initiatives, and continuous feedback mechanisms.

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