

Talent Engagement Approaches and Competitiveness Among Five Star Hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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Abstract

The study sought to establish talent engagement approaches and competitiveness among five-star hotels in Nairobi city county, Kenya. Engagement is a heightened emotion and intellectual connection that talent has for their job, organisation, executives, or co-workers that influence them to apply additional discretionary effort to their work. Talent engagement is a challenge for many business organisations worldwide, as there is evidence that the number of employees giving full discretionary effort is falling. This has led to weak hospitality product diversification and differentiation in economies, including Kenya, which negatively impacts competitive advantage. The study adopted a quantitative research design. Respondents were talent and training executives upon whom structured questionnaires were administered. Data analysis was done using; descriptive statistics, bivariate correlation through Spearman's Rank correlation and multiple linear regression analyses. A bivariate correlation between each approach of the talent engagement against competitiveness among five-star hotels in Nairobi City County revealed very weak and weak negative association except psychological contract. The results implied that hotels had not embraced talent engagement through an exclusive approach of talent management but through inclusive talent management which is basically human resources management. Multiple linear regressions analysis revealed that psychological contract was the most critical approach. The H_0 : 'there is no significant relationship between talent engagement approaches adopted, and competitiveness of five-star hotels in Nairobi City County' was rejected.

Keywords: Talent Management, Talent, Engagement, Motivation, Commitment, and Competitiveness

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INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Talent engagement is a practice derived from the concept of talent management (TM) (Putra, Cho, & Liu, 2017). According to Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) (2013), TM practices involve a systematic attraction, selection, development, engagement, retention and deployment of those individuals with high potential to pivotal positions. Putra, Cho, and Liu (2017) noted that not all employees would be classified as talent because the hospitality job's nature is labour intensive, with few jobs being knowledge-based. The knowledge-based jobs are the ones that differentially contribute to the organisation's sustainable competitive advantage (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Jafari & Xiao, 2016). Holland (2017) defined talent engagement as the extent to which employees drive and invest themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally into their work. The engaged talent is bound intellectually and emotionally with the organisation, passionate about goals and committed to values (Marrybeth, Brackz, Hadson, & Zlong, 2019). The organisational engagement results in talent staying longer, and frequently finds strategic, innovative and more effective avenues to increase the organisation's value (Morethe, Schultz, & Swarts, 2020). Moreover; engaged talent is emotionally bonded to their jobs and willing to exploit their knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) to boost their job performance.

1.2 Problem of the Statement

Tomany (2012)'s research findings suggest that the number of employees giving full discretionary effort at work

is falling. Moreover, Putra *et al.* (2017) cited reports which indicated that talent engagement is a challenge for many business organisations worldwide. For instance, 70% of the American workforce was not engaged but rather emotionally disconnected from their workplaces. It has been recognised that the hospitality industry in Kenya is characterised by the unfavourable work environment, including low wages, long working hours, few career opportunities, and low work-life balance (GoK, 2013; World Bank, 2018). These evoke concerns that talent may not be committed to putting extra discretionary effort into exploiting their KSAs in their jobs and hotels to achieve sustained competitive advantage. Besides, reviews on the hospitality and tourism studies in Kenya have not yielded talent engagement literature in revealing the relationship between competitive advantage and engagement. The current study sought to establish whether competitive advantage by the five-star hotels in Nairobi City County is influenced through talent engagement.

1.3 Study Objective

To establish talent engagement approaches that influence competitiveness in five-star hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

1.4 Study Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between talent engagement approaches adopted and competitiveness of five-star hotels in Nairobi City County

LITERATURE REVIEW

Extrinsic and intrinsic motivations have been touted as approaches that drive engagement. Talent engagement studies based on hospitality used talent promotions, financial rewards, and performance appraisal as extrinsic motivators (Putra *et al.*, 2017; Kaewsaeng-on, 2017; Kichuk, 2017; Nwoye, 2017). On the other hand; career development opportunities, work environment, psychological contract were the most recurring intrinsic motivators in talent engagement studies based on hospitality (Tomany, 2012; Kaewsaeng-on, 2017; Khoreva, Vaiman, & VanZalk, 2017; Kichuk, 2017; Nwoye, 2017). These motivations strengthen the relationship between talent and organisations. When talent value the relationship, they apply discretionary effort and expertise to create competitive resources for the organisation (Kichuk, 2017).

Putra *et al.* (2017)'s study espoused that promotion positively influences commitment of talent, which in turn encourages them to use their discretionary effort for competitive performances. Soomro, Syed, & Memon (2016) added that organisations with structured promotional opportunities increased chances for their talent to be committed to the organisation's objectives. Rewarding talent with financial incentives also increases commitment, which stimulates discretionary effort from them to benefit organisations (Kaewsaeng-on, 2017). Kichuk (2017) concurred with this assertion and added that talent is sensitive to financial compensation. Additionally, performance appraisal informs on recognition of talent's contribution to getting rewards whose end is creating commitment (Kichuk, 2017).

Talent Career development activities form a significant part of intrinsic motivation. Several studies on intrinsic motivation in the TM studies have been conducted to understand ways that have been adopted in engaging talent. Kaewsaeng-on (2017)'s work indicated that hotels adopted training, challenging work, job rotation, increased responsibility and job enrichment in developing employees. Lyria (2014)'s work highlighted job rotations, informal career discussions with executives, challenging job assignments and mentorship relationships with senior colleagues, career centres, career counselling, career workshops, formal education as ways of developing talent. These strategies increase employees' value for themselves and for the firm to improve organisation's performance. Nwoye (2017)'s respondents noted that talent was developed through active, challenging work. Some of Nwoye (2017)'s respondents insisted that what matters in making talent engaged is the employer's entire value proposition.

The work environment that includes authority, autonomy to be innovative, and work and life balance is a key constituent of intrinsic motivation. Putra *et al.* (2017) emphasised that a right work environment is a key driver of commitment for hospitality talent. Kaewsaeng-on (2017) agreed and added that the hotels' environments mean more to talent, especially millennials than extrinsic motivators like money. This suggests that matters that catered for their social wellbeing contributed to the desired work environment. Nwoye (2017)'s study added that the best work environment encourages teamwork, supportive and trustworthy relationships. In such environments, employees can be creative, exchange ideas, and take risks without fear for their careers. Therefore, adopting an environment that allows authority and autonomy to enhance engagement.

Psychological contract (PC) is critical to an employee's intrinsic motivation to achieve organisational commitment (Holland, 2017). It is an employee's belief in a reciprocal obligation between the employee and the organisation through a mutual relationship, and it is perceived by the employee rather than the organisation (Ballou, 2013 & Soomro *et al.*, 2016). If the employer upholds the psychological contract in terms of pay and job security, the employee will deliver hard work, loyalty, sacrifices, etc., in return (Oppenheim, 2018).

The psychological contract can be achieved by three phases (Soomro *et al.*, 2016). Firstly, a positive psychological contract facilitates employees' own excellent job satisfaction that spurs additional job performance emotions. Secondly, it can increase the enthusiasm of employees. When the employees have functioning enthusiasm, they ascribe additional meaning to the job and positively influence job performance. At work, enthusiasm brings extra care for job and raises employees' potential capability, resulting in additional values to the organisation. Thirdly, well-adjusted psychological contract stimulates the development of employees. Such employees will always put extra efforts in their jobs to deliver more effectively to their organisations. If an employee views their psychological contract with an employer positively, they are more likely to become engaged in their work and highly motivated to contribute to organisational effectiveness (Oppenheim, 2018). When the employer maintains its promises in the eyes of the employee, the psychological contract is considered fulfilled.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in eleven 5 star hotels in Nairobi City County. It adopted a quantitative research design. Respondents included; talent and training executives. The sample size was 22 in which each hotel provided two executives, one in every target department/ line. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data. Pre-testing of the research instruments was carried out in two, 5 (five) star-rated hotels which eventually did not participate in the study. Items that posted a Cronbach's coefficient Alphas of less than 0.6 were dropped. Data analysis was done using; descriptive statistics, bivariate correlation through Spearman's Rank correlation and multiple linear regression analyses.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Response Rate

Twenty-two (22) respondents involving hotel management staff were targeted. Table 4.1 shows the types of Talent and training executives and their response rates.

Table 4.1: Response Rate

Type of Respondents	Respondents Targeted	Participants that Responded	Percentage Response
Talent executives	11	11	100.00
Training executives	11	11	100.00
TOTAL	22	22	100.00

Responses were received from 22 respondents which translated to 100%, and it was deemed adequate for analysis and interpretation. This was in accordance with Johnson and Wislar (2012) who asserted that a response of above 60% is generally accepted as a threshold for survey quality in social sciences.

4.2 Approaches to Talent Engagement

This section was based on the study objective that stated as; 'to establish talent engagement approaches that influence competitiveness in five-star hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya'. The corresponding study hypothesis, 'there is no significant relationship between talent engagement approaches adopted and competitiveness of five-star hotels in Nairobi City County', was tested. Talent and training executives were asked to indicate talent engagement approaches they considered applicable in their respective hotels. Extrinsic and intrinsic motivators yielded talent engagement approaches as revealed in Table 4.2 and 4.3.

Table 4.2: Extrinsic Motivators

Extrinsic Motivators	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean \bar{x}	SD	Spearman's rho (r_s)	Sig. (2-tailed) *
Performance appraisal	18 (81.8%)	4 (18.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1.18	0.395	-0.103	0.649
Range of financial rewards	8 (36.4%)	5 (22.7%)	9 (40.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2.00	0.926	-0.258	0.247
Promotion opportunities	14 (63.6%)	8 (36.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1.36	0.492	-0.165	0.463
Competitiveness	21 (95.5%)	1 (4.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0(0%)	1.05	0.213		

Notes: n=22. A five-point Likert scale was used with 1 indicating "Strongly agree" and 5 "Strongly Disagree"

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed) - $p < 0.05$

Talent and training executives strongly agreed that “performance appraisal inform on talent’s contributions for recognition ($\bar{x} = 1.18$; $SD = 0.395$)”. The mean (1.18) indicates a strong agreement that the performance appraisal system has been adopted in five-star hotels in Nairobi City County. It further shows that the results of appraisal informed on the recognition of talent for various rewards. The standard deviation was 0.395, indicating a normal variation on the responses. The findings imply that talent is proactively committed to their jobs. It is apparent that this led to the engagement of talent, which may have contributed to the target hotels’ competitiveness.

The findings concur with Kichuk (2017), who noted that recognising talent for rewards develops rational commitment, reflecting whether a job meets talent’s monetary and development interests and fits in a motivational, organisational environment. Putra *et al.* (2017); Jooss (2018); Soomro *et al.* (2016); Fathy (2018)’s findings were consisted with the current study by citing increased commitment due to performance results that led to promotion and extra salary. However, Spearman’s Rank correlation test yielded a very weak negative association ($r_s = -0.103$) between talent’s performance appraisal and competitiveness (producing exceptional products/ services) of hotels. Thus, the more the current appraisal approaches are used, competitiveness decreases. H_0 , there is no significant relationship between talent engagement approaches adopted and competitiveness of five–star hotels in Nairobi City County was accepted because the p -value was 0.649.

Talent and training executives agreed that “talent is provided with a range of financial rewards ($\bar{x} = 2.000$; $SD = 0.926$)”. The mean (2.000) indicates an agreement that a policy of providing talent with financial rewards when opportunities arose was adopted in five-star hotels in Nairobi City County. The standard deviation was 0.926, indicating a normal variation on the respondents’ responses. The implication is that one of the reasons why five-star hotels in Nairobi City County are competitive is because talent has been more engaged because of the adoption of financial rewards to them.

These findings were consistent with those of Kichuk (2017) whose study noted that engaged talent apply their discretionary effort to perform complex tasks whose success put their organisations above those who do not have the advantage of this extrinsic motivator. It was apparent that only individuals considered talent needed to be engaged using financial rewards, and this confirmed earlier findings by Kichuk (2017), Nwoye (2017); Putra *et al.* (2017) whose informants noted that engagement of talent in critical positions through monetary rewards influenced positive results in their organisations. Conversely, findings by Kaewsaeng-on (2017) were sceptical whether monetary incentives were effective in engaging talent. The Spearman’s Rank correlation test yielded a very weak negative association ($r_s = -0.258$) between financial rewards and competitiveness (producing exceptional products/ services) of hotels. Thus, the more the current financial rewards are used, the lower the competitiveness of the hotels. H_0 , there is no significant relationship between talent engagement approaches adopted and competitiveness of five–star hotels in Nairobi City County was accepted because the p -value was 0.247.

Talent and training executives also strongly agreed that “when promotion opportunities become available, talent are considered first ($\bar{x} = 1.36$; $SD = 0.492$)”. The mean (1.36) shows a strong agreement that talent is given priority when opportunities for promotion arise. The standard deviation was 0.492, indicating a normal variation on the respondents’ responses. The findings imply that five-star hotels in Nairobi City County are filling promotion opportunities that become available with talent. Furthermore, the occupation of leadership positions or working in pivotal positions by talent increases the quality of products and service in these hotels. This is because these individuals develop a significant emotional attachment with their jobs which goes beyond the call of duty to further the organisation’s interest.

The findings are similar to the study results by Kibui, Gachunga, and Namusonge (2014) who found that; when promotion opportunities become available, talent is considered first. In addition, promotion is accompanied by rewards which include enriched jobs, incentives, bonuses, allowances, and increased salaries. Putra *et al.* (2017) concurred with this proposition and added that such rewards positively influence commitment behaviour. This behaviour forms engagement in which talent applies extra effort and uses their unique characteristics to produce inimitable products and services. Soomro *et al.* (2016); Kichuk (2017) also noted that sufficiently engaged talent achieves high-performance levels enough to cause competitive advantage.

However, Spearman’s Rank correlation test revealed a very weak negative association ($r_s = -0.165$) between promotion opportunities and competitiveness (producing exceptional products/ services) of hotels. Thus, the more the promotion opportunities are filled with talent only, the lower hotels become competitive. H_0 , there is no significant relationship between talent engagement approaches adopted and competitiveness of five–star hotels in Nairobi City County was accepted because the p -value was 0.463.

Intrinsic motivators were also explored whether they lead to talent engagement in influencing competitiveness in five-star hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya’. Table 4.3 shows the results of intrinsically based approaches to talent engagement.

Table 4.3: Intrinsic Motivators

Intrinsic Motivators	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean \bar{x}	SD	Spearman's rho (r_s)	Sig. (2-tailed)*
Career development	3 (13.6%)	8 (36.4%)	6 (27.3%)	2 (9.1%)	3 (13.6%)	2.73	1.241	-0.339	0.122
Best work environment	10 (45.5%)	8 (36.4%)	4 (18.2%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	1.73	0.767	-0.223	0.318
Psychological contract	3 (13.6%)	5 (22.7%)	4 (18.2%)	3 (13.6%)	7 (31.8%)	3.27	1.486	0.233	0.265
Competitiveness	21 (95.5%)	1(4.5%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	1.05	0.213		

Notes: n=22. A five-point Likert scale was used with 1 indicating “Strongly agree” and 5 “Strongly Disagree”

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed) - $p < 0.05$

The Talent and training executives leaned towards uncertainty on whether “hotels provide talent with career development opportunities ($\bar{x} = 2.73$; SD =1.241)”. The mean (2.73) indicates that development opportunities were moderately adopted and there was a wider gap between those for and against as demonstrated by the standard deviation, 1.241 that showed a substantial divergence of responses. This implies that most talent was engaged through career development opportunities; however, a minority but the significant group was not. This is likely to have an average impact on inspiring competitiveness among five-star hotels in Nairobi City County.

These findings were slightly different from those of Mansoori (2015)’s study that emphatically endorsed career development opportunities that would practically enhance talent’s knowledge and skills. The findings were also contrary to Kaewsaeng-on (2017)’s findings which stressed that talent who were deployed to enriched jobs got better acquainted with unique abilities that made their production efforts much easier thus attaining desirable engagement levels. The Spearman’s Rank correlation test yielded a weak negative association ($r_s = -0.339$) between career development and competitiveness (producing exceptional products/ services) of hotels. Thus, the more career development opportunities are awarded to talent only, the lower the hotels' competitiveness. H_0 , there is no significant relationship between talent engagement approaches adopted and competitiveness of five–star hotels in Nairobi City County was accepted because the p -value was 0.122.

Talent and training executives inclined to agree whether “talent are allowed the best work environment ($\bar{x} = 1.73$; SD = 0.767)”. The mean (1.73) shows that talent was accorded the best work environment, which influenced talent in five-star hotels in Nairobi City County. The standard deviation was 0.767, indicating a normal variation on the respondents’ responses. The findings imply that five-star hotels in Nairobi City County permitted talent to take risks to innovate and improve their products and services. These improved or innovative products and services may have contributed to the competitiveness of these hotels.

These findings are consistent with Linden and Teece (2014); Kaewsaeng-on (2017) who stressed that authority and autonomy formed good work environments for talent. Thus, these make talent to feel in charge and likely to apply their discretionary effort and expertise for the organisation's benefit. Putra *et al.* (2017)’s research work in the hospitality setting found that work environment characterised by authority and autonomy positively predicted engagement of talent which were stimuli for competitiveness. Study findings also concurred with those by Kibui *et al.* (2014) who found that; prevailing work environment allowed talent a significant amount of discretionary effort to their jobs. Leng (2013); Kichuk (2017); Kaewsaeng-on (2017)’s works were also in agreement that environments mean more to talent by being favourable to their personal lives which create feelings of family and belonging.

However, Spearman’s Rank correlation test revealed a very weak negative association ($r_s = -0.223$) between best work environment and competitiveness (producing exceptional products/ services) of hotels. Thus, an increase in the manipulation of the work environment in favour of talent lowers the competitiveness of hotels. H_0 , there is no significant relationship between talent engagement approaches adopted and competitiveness of five–star hotels in Nairobi City County was accepted because the p -value was 0.318.

Talent and training executives remained undecided whether hotels have developed a relationship with talent in which there are reciprocal obligations or promises (PC) ($\bar{x} = 3.27$; SD = 1.486)”. The mean (3.27) indicates that there was uncertainty whether five-star hotels in Nairobi City County have psychological contracts with their talent. The standard deviation was 1.486, indicating a substantial divergence of responses. This implies that the extent of psychological contract prevailing in these hotels is not deep enough, suggesting that benefits that would have been amassed from the practise are lost. This is likely not to impact the competitiveness of hotels to the levels anticipated of the talent management concept.

The findings for this study were slightly different from those of Oppenheim (2018) whose results reflected

the availability of most conditions that significantly predicted psychological contract, and it ultimately influenced greater levels of production. Ballou (2013)'s results were also slightly different from the current ones whose psychological contract was strongly supported. However, Spearman's Rank correlation test revealed a weak positive association ($r_s = 0.233$) between psychological contract and competitiveness (producing exceptional products/ services) of hotels. Thus, an increase in psychological contract in favour of talent increases the competitiveness of hotels. H_0 , there is no significant relationship between talent engagement approaches adopted and competitiveness of five-star hotels in Nairobi City County was accepted because the p -value was 0.265.

Opinions of the talent and training executives were sought on whether talent engagement approaches positively contribute to the the competitiveness of the hotels in terms of choosing, and producing exceptional products and/ services. Talent and training executives strongly agreed that "talent engagement activities have led to producing exceptional products/ services ($\bar{x} = 1.05$; $SD = 0.213$)". The mean (1.05) indicates that talent engagement activities adopted by five-star hotels in Nairobi City County led to talent producing exceptional products/ services. The standard deviation, a measure of the dispersion of a set of data from its mean, was 0.213, indicating a normal variation on the respondents' responses. The findings imply that five-star hotels in Nairobi City County's engagement strategies deliver high-quality products and services contributing to competitive advantage. The findings are similar to the study results by Kibui *et al.* (2014); Moayedi and Vaseghi (2016) found that; engaged employees are strong organisational assets for sustained competitive advantage. These engaged employees are difficult to imitate and are unique to an organisation, thus lending credence to the firm's resource-based theory.

4.3 Effective Talent Engagement Approaches that Influence Competitiveness

All the talent engagement approaches were subjected to multiple linear regressions. The results of the regression coefficients are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Regression Coefficients^a

	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients		t	Sig.
	β	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	1.796	0.217			8.275	0.000*
Career development opportunities for talent (X_1)	-0.087	0.030	-0.506		-2.921	0.011*
Best work environment for talent (X_2)	-0.101	0.055	-0.365		-1.834	0.087
Performance appraisal for talent (X_3)	-0.268	0.097	-0.496		-2.746	0.015*
Range of financial rewards for talent (X_4)	-0.092	0.039	-0.386		-2.328	0.034*
Promotion opportunities for talent (X_5)	-0.150	0.076	-0.346		-1.975	0.067
Psychological contract (X_6)	0.113	0.030	0.787		3.824	0.002*

a Dependent Variable: Competitiveness –Talent engagement activities have led to individuals producing exceptional products/ services

* $P < 0.05$

Table 4.4 yielded values of the coefficients to be estimated and their corresponding significant values (p -values). The p -values were used to test the hypothesis about β , the coefficients. In this test, the decision was to reject the null hypothesis whenever the p -values were less than 0.05. Table 4.4 shows that, talent is provided with career development opportunities (X_1) ($\beta = -0.087$, $p = 0.011$), talent performance appraisal (X_3) ($\beta = -0.268$, $p = 0.015$), range of financial rewards for talent (X_4) ($\beta = -0.092$, $p = 0.034$), and psychological contract (X_6) ($\beta = 0.113$, $p = 0.002$), were significant thus; rejected. Promotion opportunities for talent (X_5) ($\beta = -0.150$, $p = 0.067$), and best work environment for talent (X_2) ($\beta = -0.101$, $p = 0.087$) were not significant thus; the null hypothesis was accepted.

Since X_6 (Psychological Contract) coefficient was positive, it implied that it was positively related to competitiveness (talent engagement activities have led to individuals producing exceptional products/ services). This indicated that an increase in each of this coefficient increased that of competitiveness. Though descriptive statistics showed that talent and training executives were uncertain whether the psychological contract had been adopted in hotels, regression test reveals that PC among talent was available and sufficient to influence competitiveness. This finding is consistent with those of Ballou (2013); Soomro *et al.* (2016); Oppenheim (2018) which found a positive relationship between engagement through PC and competitiveness of organisations' products and services.

Coefficients X_1 (career development opportunities), X_3 (Performance appraisal) and X_4 (financial rewards) negatively impacted competitiveness (talent engagement activities that ought to enable individuals producing exceptional products/ services). This showed that the decrease in each of these coefficients decreased that of competitiveness. Seemingly, career development opportunities did not form substantial engagement which caused a deficit in the five star hotels' perceived competitiveness in Nairobi County. These findings were

different from a ‘research on understanding talent management in the hotel sector in Bournemouth, England’, by Kichuk (2017).

It also appears that performance appraisal systems in place formed engagement that made competitiveness of five-star hotels to decline. Performance appraisal ought to have informed recognition of talent’s contribution in that lesser performance called for skills upgrading, and superior performance attracted rewards. It implies that performance appraisal applied for all employees instead of talent only meaning hotels could not have enough resources to adopt a range of skill upgrading programmes and a meaningful reward system. This view is consistent with that of Putra *et al.* (2017); Fathy (2018); Jooss (2018) whose informants adopted an inclusive approach of engagement in which all individuals were subjected to the appraisal process. Thunnissen (2015)’s view differed with the rest of these and noted that talent management practice, including engagement, should be narrowed to talent only for meaningful focus on them in terms of resources. It can be inferred that most of the five-star hotels in Nairobi City County adopted an inclusive or a blended talent engagement approach which did not influence sufficient commitment, thus reduced competitive advantage.

The findings further found that financial rewards negatively impacted the competitive advantage. This implies that these rewards were not significant enough to form a meaningful engagement because their influence on competitiveness was negative. This finding was in accordance with that of Kaewsaeng-on (2017), who revealed that hotels found it difficult to fully engage the talent using financial rewards. This can be explained by Putra *et al.* (2017), who emphasised that the hospitality industry is known for low wages.

The results further showed that promotion opportunities exclusively allotted to talent did not influence the competitiveness of five-star hotels in Nairobi City County. This implies that individuals who were promoted to critical positions have not been able to apply additional discretionary effort to produce exceptional products/ services. This study opted for the narrow view of TM focused on only individuals considered talent would be promoted to draw maximum and unique performance from their engagement. Thus promotion opportunities which ought to have motivated them did not succeed. This finding differed with that of Kichuk (2017)’s study whose participants affirmed that their promotion increased their commitment and gained tangible benefits for themselves and their hotels.

The findings further revealed that the work environment did not influence the competitiveness of five-star hotels in Nairobi City County. This suggests that the work environment within five-star hotels in Nairobi City County does not inspire commitment that will influence talent to invest their emotional, intellectual and discretionary capacities to generate exceptional products/ services. Additionally, the findings imply that five-star hotels’ work environments were complex, that is; required authority, autonomy, work and life balance, and teamwork factors. Lack or insufficient enrichment of any of these factors likely drove down engagement to the extent that it did not influence competitiveness if these hotels. These findings concurred with those of Kichuk (2017) in which one of the components of the work environment, WLB was harder to achieve in certain departments like the restaurant, food and beverage production and housekeeping staff which did not influence competitiveness meaningfully.

It can be concluded that the most effective approach in influencing competitiveness is a psychological contract.

From the values of the coefficients, the corresponding multiple linear regression equation on how talent engagement influenced competitiveness of five–star hotels in Nairobi City County is expressed below;
 $y = 1.796 - 0.087x_1 + 0.113x_2 - 0.268x_3 - 0.092x_4 - 0.150x_5 - 0.1010x_6 \dots \dots \dots (1)$

H₀₁ posited that; ‘there is no significant relationship between talent engagement approaches adopted and competitiveness of five–star hotels in Nairobi City County’. Multiple regression results revealed positive and significant results ($\beta = 1.796$, $t = 8.275$, $p = 0.000$); thus the hypothesis was rejected. The hypothesis was restated as ‘there is a significant difference between talent engagement and competitiveness of five–star hotels in Nairobi City County at 95% confidence level’. This indicated that talent engagement influenced competitiveness of five–star hotels in Nairobi City County. It suggests that talent engagement approaches adopted, drove up the competitiveness of the hotels. Those by Gitonga (2016) corroborate these findings; and Kichuk (2017) whose surveys posited that engagement of talent through the implementation of TM influenced competitive advantage because of increased levels of engagement.

CONCLUSIONS

A bivariate correlation between each approach of talent engagement against competitiveness among five star hotels in Nairobi City County revealed very weak and weak negative association except psychological contract. The results implied that hotels had not embraced talent engagement through the exclusive talent management approach but through inclusive talent management which is basically human resources management. Multiple linear regressions analysis revealed that psychological contract was the most critical approach. The H₀, there is no significant relationship between talent engagement approaches adopted, and competitiveness of five–star hotels in Nairobi City County’ was rejected.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

1. This research has been conducted among the management teams and guests in five-star hotels; it is recommended that related research is conducted on individuals considered talent in the same hotels.
2. Due to limited studies of talent management in Kenya, it is recommended that similar studies are conducted in other sectors such as; healthcare, transport, mining, horticulture manufacturing, among others.

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