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Association between age, critical skills and work perspectives

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Abstract

The main aim of this study is to report on the associations between age, critical skills and work perspectives (job satisfaction, career/organizational commitment and job characteristics) as perceived by resort employees. It highlights that age and critical skills play an important role towards work perspectives. A descriptive research design approach was followed. Three hundred and eighteen fully completed questionnaires were included in the statistical analysis, which included exploratory factor analysis, Spearman's rho and a structural equation model. Resort employees of different ages do not experience job characteristics differently. Older employees are often more experienced in the work environment, which contributes to an increase in job satisfaction, while younger employees who start building a career in the hospitality sector experience less job satisfaction. Older employees are more committed to their careers than younger employees. Critical skills have no influence on participants' perception of job characteristics. However, resort employees who have a variety of critical skills experience an increase in job satisfaction.

Keywords – Age, Critical skills, Work perspectives, Resort employees, Structural Equation Modeling

Introduction

Hospitality, a service-orientated sector within Tourism (Scott-Hansell *et al.,* 2008), strives to ensure that all the guests' needs are satisfied during their stay (Saibang and Schwindt, 1998). Brotherton (1999) has found that the hospitality sector consists of five distinct characteristics, including the following: an attitude towards a guest away from home; an interactive experience; interaction between two parties, where one is seen as the host and the other as the receiving guest; tangible and intangible factors; and lastly, the host overseeing all the essential needs of guests. One of the segments within the hospitality sector includes accommodation establishments, such as hotels, holiday resorts, lodges, guesthouses, caravan parks and game parks (Saayman, 2010). These establishments are tourist accommodation providers, catering

primarily for the leisure and business travelers and providing a range of recreational activities. The main goals of these establishments are to create loyal, returning guests whose needs should be satisfied during their stay. Therefore, these establishments should provide outstanding facilities and services that could lead to a memorable experience (Murphy, 2008). Providing memorable experiences is largely influenced by employees and how they interact with guests.

Hospitality employees are employed within various departments where a service is provided and face-to-face interaction with guests take place (Wong and Keung, 2000; Chapman and Lovell, 2006). It is, however, the responsibility of these employees, not only to provide good service, but also to obtain the necessary critical skills that are needed in the hospitality workplace, thereby enhancing the image of the establishment they are employed at. This could lead to an improvement of authenticity in the hospitality workplace (Karatepe *et al.,* 2012; Maumbe and Van Wyk, 2011).
According to the Global Competitiveness Report (2012/13), South Africa has been placed almost last out of 36 countries on the list of labor liabilities. This country is in need of a highly skilled, motivated and satisfied workforce, free from discrimination. Based on the findings of the Global Competitiveness Report, liabilities exceed assets, therefore requiring management interventions. Management should initiate change and quality improvement towards individual employee skills and incorporate norms and values which will require job content skills, critical skills, an understanding of work and work processes, as well as commitment and endurance, to name but a few (Nel *et al.,* 2004; Van Dyk *et al.,* 2013). Macro-economic changes, such as globalization, have affected organisations' hierarchical structures and employment in societies (Zwane, 2012). South Africa has a shortage of skilled and professional labor and the labor market consists of an imbalance between skilled and unskilled human resources (Nel *et al.,* 2004; Statistics South Africa, 2013). According to Statistics South Africa (2013), a decline in the South African labor market aged 15-64 is noticeable. This led to the aim of this research, which is to investigate the following: *What is the association between age, critical skills and work perspectives as perceived by resort employees?* This is especially important, since the South African tourism industry is sustaining growth above 5% per annum and competition amongst accommodation establishments in the country is fierce.

Literature Review

In addressing the aim of this paper, the literature review has been structured under the following sub-headings: Age, critical skills and work perspectives (job satisfaction, career/organizational commitment and job characteristics). The importance of this research is that the constructs have previously been researched separately in various contexts and settings. The study will address these constructs simultaneously and will thus enhance literature related to human resource management in the hospitality sector.

Age

Employers in the hospitality sector do not often recognize the age diversity of their employees (Institute of Hospitality, 2013). This could be seen as an unacceptable hospitality and operations management practice.

Hospitality managers should therefore take cognizance of the age diversity of their employees and build this into a strategic plan which will assist them with resource planning, training needs, performance management and job design, increasing the hospitality sector's attractiveness. Due to the physical nature of the job, many positions in this sector are considered as entry-level jobs and better suited to younger employees. However, older employees are needed to assist management due to the length of their service and the experience they have in equipping a younger generation with the necessary skills and work ethics in the hospitality workplace (Institute of Hospitality, 2013). Research indicates that age has a negative association with work performance and that older employees are less productive (Park and Gutchess, 2000). Other researchers have found that mature employees have positive work attributes (like loyalty and cooperation), are able to progress in their work and enjoy the organizational part of their work (Solnet *et al.,* 2012; Chang, 2012; Iun and Huang, 2007). Age, therefore, plays an important role in the hospitality sector and can be utilized as a strategic tool for managers to benchmark hospitality establishments against each other to gain a competitive advantage.

Critical skills

Skills that are required by managers and graduates in the hospitality workplace are readily available in literature (Ineson and Kempa, 1996; Baum, 2006; Beesley and Davidson, 2013) and an increasing number of factors are associated with skills that are needed in various occupations to perform a job (Berman and Machin, 2000; Green and Owen, 2003; Marchante *et al.,* 2005). Skills that are utilized in the workplace are important to individuals, businesses and society (IFER, 2004). In view of this, relevant key findings by authors have been that skill shortages of employees in the hospitality sector are often characterized by high levels of turnover and economic implications for hospitality establishments, thereby increasing operational costs, and that skill shortage or lack of skills is a top issue facing the global hospitality sector (ISCH, 2006; Michael *et al.,* 2011).The hospitality workplace environment requires esthetic labor, which comprises required skills that are compatible with job requirements to meet guests' expectations (*Warhurst et al.,* 2000). This emphasizes the importance of skills in an experience-based economy in the broader hospitality sector (Baum, 2006; Baum and Szivas, 2008).

Critical skills are the abilities that one needs in order to guarantee service excellence (OALD, 2005). Within the hospitality sector, it has been found that critical skills are also referred to as *soft skills*, *people skills*, *non-technical skills*, *employability skills* and *generic skills* (Baum, 2002; Johanson *et al.,* 2010; Weber *et al.,* 2013). Under this broad umbrella term, critical skills include communication, problem solving, information technology, self-management and personal style, work-related dispositions and attitude, teamwork, creative thinking and leadership skills (Haiyan and Baum, 2006; Saayman and Geldenhuys, 2003; Hu *et al.*, 2009).

The critical skills that are utilized by employees is one of the important factors that could contribute to the success of any hospitality establishment. Hospitality establishments can therefore improve the selection process of employees;

enhance on-the-job training processes; improve development programs for employees; and build up on performance evaluations, thereby reducing the costs that are related to operating a hospitality establishment and increasing profitability (Weber *et al.,* 2010; Cobanoglu *et al.,* 2006). Another group of studies has found that when employees have the necessary critical skills in fulfilling job demands, they will perform better in the workplace and will be committed to the establishment they are employed at (Hecht and Allen, 2005; Kristof-Brown *et al.,* 2005; Lopez and Babin, 2009).

Job satisfaction

With an increase in competition and globalization, recruiting, managing of resources and retaining of employees have become important factors which will contribute to the success of the hospitality sector. Therefore, increasing employees' job satisfaction, organizational commitment and motivation will increase the competiveness amongst hospitality establishments (Nadiri and Tanova, 2010). Employees who are satisfied with their jobs will be more focused on customers, helpful towards guests and will provide excellent services, which will then result in customer satisfaction (Kim *et al.,* 2005). A high level of employee satisfaction is important to hospitality managers, as they have the responsibility to provide jobs that are intrinsically rewarding (Robbins, 2001; Oshagbemi, 2000). A handful of other related studies in the hospitality sector have found that human resource management practices, such as job design, job characteristics, organizational environment and industry structures, are sources that might contribute to job satisfaction (Kusluvan, 2003; Kusluvan *et al.,* 2010; Yeh, 2013).

Career/Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment in the workplace is a challenging concept in the research field of management, organizational behavior and human resource management (Cohen, 2003; Cooper-Hakim and Viswesvaran, 2005; Cohen, 2007). The operational development of organizational commitment in the workplace has often affected the conceptualization of related commitment forms, for example occupation, the job and workgroup (Riketta and Van Dick, 2005; Meyer and Smith, 2000). Research that is related to the hospitality sector has found that if hospitality service providers' main focus is on satisfying their guests, their organizational commitment is higher and the employees are more satisfied with and committed to their jobs, which might lead to better individual performances (Kim *et al.,* 2005; Fullford, 2005).

Organizational commitment is often determined by individual (age), as well as organizational (job design) and non-organizational (availability of alternatives) factors (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Forrester, 2000; Janssen, 2004). Affective commitment in the hospitality work environment is highly desirable, as employees who show a high affective commitment to the hospitality establishment are often more willingly contributing to organizational performance and will do more than what is expected of them by management (*Kazlauskaite et al.,* 2006). According to Lam *et al.* (2001) and Richardson (2009), employees who are committed to their work have a better chance of providing a positive and satisfying experience to guests.

Employees, when allowed and trained to use their own initiative and judgment when performing their tasks, tend to respond quickly to guests' requests and this is likely to ensure that employees experience a sense of commitment to the hospitality establishment (Chow *et al.,* 2006). If positive affection is shown towards these employees, it enhances creativity, enthusiasm, and high levels of energy and determination (Karatepe *et al.,* 2012). Furthermore, when employees' needs for affiliation, autonomy and a secure income are provided for by their employers, they will experience greater job satisfaction (Iplik *et al.,* 2009).

Job characteristics

Research in the past has conceptualized the relationship between job characteristics and creativity of employees, and job characteristics and job satisfaction of chefs who were employed at hospitality establishments of different sizes (Bartlett, 2007; Tsaur *et al.,* 2011; Ozturk *et al.,* 2013), but not in the context of resort employees in developing countries. The job characteristics model of Hackman and Oldham (1975) postulates how employees perceive various dimensions of their jobs in the work environment and includes factors such as *skill variety* (when an employee's job requires various activities, such as skill levels that are utilized in the workplace), *task identity* (completion of entire work from beginning to end), *task significance* (how the job affects the lives or work of others), *autonomy* (employees have freedom, independence and discretion in scheduling and determining procedures during work contact time), *job feedback* (feedback given to employees on their job performance by managers) and *dealing with others* (the way in which the job requires employees to work closely with others in the hospitality establishment) (Ozturk *et al.,* 2013). When an employee's job contains a sufficient amount of the above-mentioned factors, three cognitive states, namely *experienced meaningfulness*, *experienced responsibility* and *knowledge of results* are aroused (Lee-Ross, 2006).

Methods

The research design is descriptive and quantitative and has been done by means of a self-administered questionnaire. The study has followed a probability sampling method and a stratified random sampling technique has been used to conduct the survey. A stratified random sampling is a sampling technique that is used to restrict samples (employees) to those who are less extreme. Making use of this technique ensures that all parts of the study population are represented in order to decrease the error in the estimation. The stratified sampling of the study population is dived into groups. From each stratum, a sample is drawn independently in different strata and the collection of these samples, by means of a random sample selection, introduces a stratified random sample (University of Alberta, 2013).

Procedure

A proposal concerning this research was sent to the Human Resources Department and the Chief Executive Officer of the resort group under investigation to explain the purpose of the research and to obtain final approval. All respondents were briefed on the research. Trained field workers were strategically placed at each of the

selected resorts. The respondents were divided, based on the various departments they were employed in and within these departments a random sampling technique was drawn from the study population (employees). The field workers remained available to assist with any questions while the respondents completed the survey. The target population included all the employees on all the different shifts at the selected resorts. Respondents that are employed in food and beverage, maintenance, retail, spa and housekeeping departments, as well as the front office, -form part of the study population.

Participants

The total sample for this study consists of 400 employees who were employed at three resorts of a well-known resort group in South Africa; they participated in the survey during the period June 2012 to July 2012. A total of 318 questionnaires that were fully completed by employees at the three resorts were obtained and included in the statistical calculations. The remaining 82 questionnaires were left out of the statistical analyses due to incomplete questionnaires and respondents being on annual leave or weekly days off. This represents, therefore, an 80% response rate of the fully completed questionnaires. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), out of a population of 400 (*N*), 196 respondents (*S)* are considered representative of a study. The number of completed questionnaires by employees at the three resorts of the resort group is thus larger than the required number of questionnaires.

Measures

The questionnaire consists of work that has been done by Haiyan and Baum (2006), and Kim et al. (2011).
The questionnaire comprises three sections and includes the following measures: Section A, which consists of eight items and has been used to determine the demographic profile of the respondents, such as *gender, age and education*. Section B, in which perspectives of work have been measured and which includes ten work environment-related questions, e.g. *my work suits my personality, my work is demanding and my current position is my preferred field of work*. Respondents were asked to rate their answers on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from *don't agree at all* to *fully agree*. Section C, which consists of two sections. The first section measures the answers to 50questions (e.g. *talking to others, finding out what guests want, I must be honest in my job*) on important skills in the employee's job environs by making use of a comprehensive five-point Likert scale of 1 (not important) to 5 (extremely important). In the second section (Section C), the authors have measured the answers to 50 questions (e.g. *talking to others, finding out what guests want, I must be honest in my job*) on the extent to which employees use these important skills in their workplace. The answers could be rated on a five-point Likert scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (to a great extent).

Analysis

The data analysis has been done by making use of SPSS 20.0 (SPSS Inc., 2011). First, the dataset was tested to determine its suitability for exploratory factor analysis. The data's factorability was assessed by using two statistical measures that were generated as part

of the factor analysis, namely the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. These two measures determine the relationship among items, as well as the adequacy of the sample size (Pallant, 2010). Bartlett's test of sphericity should be significant ($p < 0.05$) for the factor analysis to be considered appropriate (Pallant, 2010). Tabachnick and Fidell, as cited by Pallant (2010), suggest values of the KMO index of above 0.6. The Cronbach's alpha (CA) is an indication of internal consistency of the Likert scales that have been used. The CA coefficient of a scale should be above 0.7 (DeVellis, 2003). The CA values are sensitive to the number of items in a Likert scale on a regular basis, with shorter scales less than ten items, often producing low CA values. Therefore, it is appropriate to report the mean inter-item correlation as well. An optimal range for the inter-item correlation should fall between 0.2 and 0.4 (Briggs and Cheek, 1986; Pallant, 2010).

Social scientists are often interested in variables that cannot be directly observed, such as job satisfaction, critical skills and work perspectives. Authors use the term *latent variables* or *factors* on a regular basis in describing unobserved variables. A structural equation model (SEM) is a statistical technique that can be used to reduce the number of observed variables into a smaller amount of latent variables in examining the co-variation among a set of observed variables (Schreiber *et al.,* 2006). The authors have used Amos (Amos Development Company, 2009) to construct the SEM model and test the model fit. Measured variables are characterized by squares. Circles in the SEM represent latent variables, while single-headed arrows represent regression weights (Arbuckle, 2007). One example of a statistic that minimizes the impact of sample size on the model chi-square is the relative/normed chi-square (Wheaton *et al.,* 1977). An acceptable ratio for the chi-square, divided by its degrees of freedom, is between 2.0 and 5.0 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). Values for the comparative fit index (CFI) should vary between 0.0 and 1.0 with values closer to 1.0, indicating a good fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999; Hooper *et al.,* 2008). Blunch (2008) states that a SEM with an RMSEA value of 0.10 are not acceptable.

Results

Profile of the employees

Most of the employees were female (56%), followed by males (43%). Thirty seven percent of the employees obtained a high school qualification and 16% completed primary school. The majority of employees' home language was Afrikaans (70%), followed by English (30%). Some of the employees spoke other local South African languages such as SiSwati (30%) and Southern Sotho (19%). The average age of the employees was 43 years. The geographical region in which the three resorts of the resort group are located, contributes to this factor.

The interrelationship among the set of variables has been examined by using an exploratory factor analysis, thereby identifying groups of variables. The factor analysis attempts to produce a smaller number of linear combinations of the original variables in a way that captures most of the variability in the pattern of correlations (Pallant, 2010). A principal axis factoring technique has been used to extract factors from the data which best describe the

underlying relationship between the variables. The factor analysis has included an Oblimin with Kaiser normalization rotation technique, which allows correlation between factors. The factors in Table 1 have been labelled according to work perspectives. All the items with a factor loading that are greater than 0.4 have been considered as contributing to a factor.For work perspectives in Section B of the questionnaire, the covariance matrix were appropriate to conduct a factor analysis, as the KMO value was 0.76 and the associated Bartlett's test of sphericity value was significant at $p \leq 0.00001$. The three identified factors accounted for 62.65% of the total variance that has been explained. Although some of the Cronbach Alpha values of identified factors in Table 1 were low, the mean inter-item correlations fell in the acceptable range of between 0.2 and 0.4. The following three factors have been identified: *job satisfaction, career/organizational commitment* and *job characteristics*.

Table 1: Result of the exploratory factor analysis of work perspectives

Factors	Job satisfaction	Career/organizational commitment	Job characteristics
My work suites my personality.	.843		
My area of work is well respected by my family and friends.	.837		
I enjoy the organizational part of my job.	.664		
My current position is my preferred field of work.	.525		
Most of my work is common sense.	.449		
I enjoy the use of technology within my job.		.837	
I would like to work in other departments in the hospitality sector.		.635	
I am able to progress at the resort I am employed at.		.620	
My work is demanding			.794
My work is challenging			.780
Cronbach Alpha	.75	.50	.59
Mean-inter-item correlation	.39	.25	.40
Mean & std. deviation	3.93 ± .89	3.29 ± 1.1	4.01 ±.98

Extraction method: Principal axis factoring. Rotation method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

It is interesting to note that job characteristics obtained the highest mean of 4.01 (Table 1). This factor is somehow supported by Lee-Ross (2006), and Friday and Friday (2003). Job characteristics play an important role in a multicultural work environment of hospitality employees, for example the fact that the work environment could be challenging, including practical organization-based outcomes such as productivity, commitment and job satisfaction.

Concerning critical skills in Section C of the questionnaire, the covariance matrix was also appropriate to conduct a factor analysis, as the KMO value was 0.90. The Bartlett's test of sphericity value was significant at $p \leq 0.00001$. The principal component analysis revealed that the eight critical skills had eigenvalues larger than 1, explaining 52.75% of the total variance. Acceptable reliabilities above 0.7 were obtained. Critical skills that were utilized, as rated by resort employees, achieved a KMO value of above 0.60 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant at $p \leq 0.00001$. The CA of identified factors (skills that were utilized) attained values of above 0.7. The following critical skills have been identified: *Communication, Creative thinking, Problem-solving, Information technology, Self-management and personal style, Work-related dispositions and attitudes, Team work and Leadership*. Self-management and personal style skills achieved the highest mean of the identified critical skills in Section C of the questionnaire. A study by Raybould and Wilkins (2006) has found that hospitality managers rate the self-management and personal style skills as the most important skills that employees should have in the hospitality sector. As this sector has experienced increased levels of competition and complexity in recent years, these changes reflect the need for self-management in achieving career success.

Correlations between identified factors

To indicate the strengths of the relationship between the variables in Table 2, guidelines as suggested by Cohen (1988), namely small ($r = 0.10$ to 0.29), medium ($r = 0.30$ to 0.49) and large ($r = 0.50$ to 1.0), will be used. All medium and large correlations between the identified factors are statistically significant, namely $p \leq 0.01$. The Spearman's rho in Table 2 reports on work perspectives and critical skills as perceived by resort employees and indicates a positive medium correlation between job satisfaction and job characteristics. Furthermore, job characteristics have a medium positive correlation with job satisfaction.

There is a medium correlation between communication skills and self-management and personal style skills, and a large correlation between communication skills, problem solving, information technology, work-related dispositions and attitude, teamwork, creative thinking and leadership skills.

Problem solving skills have a medium positive correlation with job satisfaction and a large positive correlation with communication, information technology, self-management and personal style, work-related dispositions and attitude, teamwork, creative thinking and leadership skills.

Information technology, on the other hand, has a medium positive correlation with self-management and personal style skills and a large positive correlation with communication, problem solving, work-related dispositions and attitude, teamwork, creative thinking and leadership skills. There is a medium positive correlation between self-management and personal style with communication, information technology and creative thinking skills, and a large correlation with problem solving, work-related dispositions and attitude, teamwork and leadership skills. Work-related dispositions and attitude skills have a large positive correlation with communication, problem solving, information technology, self-management and personal style, teamwork, creative thinking and leadership skills.Teamwork

skills have a large positive correlation with communication, problem solving, information technology, self-management and personal style, work-related dispositions and attitude, teamwork, creative thinking and leadership skills.

There is, furthermore, a positive medium correlation between creative thinking skills and information technology, self-management and personal style skills, and a large positive correlation between creative thinking skills and communication, problem solving, work-related dispositions and attitude, teamwork, creative thinking and leadership skills.

Lastly, leadership skills have a large positive correlation with age, communication, problem solving, information technology, self-management and personal style, work-related dispositions and attitude, teamwork, creative thinking and leadership skills.

Table 2: Results of the Spearman correlations between critical skills and work perspectives

Spearman rho factors	Job satisfaction	Career and organizational commitment	Job characteristics	Age	Communication skills	Problem solving skills	Information technology skills	Self-management and personal style skills	Work-related dispositions and attitude skills	Teamwork skills	Creative thinking skills	Leadership skills
Job satisfaction	-	.116*	.405**	.231**	.279**	.314**	.198**	.184**	.283**	.271**	.226**	.177**
Career and organizational commitment	.116*	-	.142*	-.222**	.044	-.054	.090	-.028	.039	-.009	-.049	.057
Job characteristics	.405**	.142*	-	.118*	.220**	.254**	.172**	.106	.182**	.219**	.135*	.175**
Age	.231**	-.222**	.118*	-	-.029	.058	-.158**	.004	.023	.015	.038	-.087
Communication skills	.279**	.044	.220**	-.029	-	.747**	.735**	.470**	.606**	.583**	.508**	.659**
Problem solving skills	.314**	-.054	.254**	.058	.747**	-	.620**	.511**	.622**	.575**	.551**	.640**
Information technology skills	.198**	.090	.172**	-.158**	.735**	.620**	-	.458**	.520**	.514**	.490**	.605**
Self-management and personal style skills	.184**	-.028	.106	.004	.470**	.511**	.458**	-	.639**	.524**	.449**	.511**
Work-related dispositions and attitude skills	.283**	.039	.182**	.023	.606**	.622**	.520**	.639**	-	.812**	.626**	.692**
Teamwork skills	.271**	-.009	.219**	.015	.583**	.575**	.514**	.521**	.812**	-	.638**	.651**
Creative thinking skills	.226**	-.049	.135*	.038	.508**	.551**	.490**	.449**	.626**	.638**	-	.602**
Leadership skills	.177**	.057	-.087	.659**	.640**	.605**	.511**	.692**	.651**	.602**	-	.594**

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Results of the SEM

The authors have applied an SEM analysis, based on data from 318 employees of a resort group in South Africa. The data were based on 110 questions and answers from three Likert-scales in the questionnaire, measuring work perspectives, important critical skills and the use of these important critical skills in the work environment. Researchers often use testing models with the same set of data to retain the best fit of an SEM (Arbuckle, 2007). The first attempt in computing the SEM produced the following unsatisfactory results: A large correlation was observed between critical skills (r = 0.77) and skills that were utilized. The regression coefficient (β) indicated that critical skills (β = 0.09) had a non-statistical relationship with work perspectives. Skills that were utilized (β = 0.88) had a non-statistical relationship with work perspectives. The chi-square divided by its degrees of freedom (x^2/df) yielded an unsatisfactory value of 11.28, a CFI of 0.62 and a RMSEA of 0.180, with a 90% confidence interval of 0.173 and 0.187. The model was rejected, based on the results. The SEM was modified and the results of the identified model are presented in Figure 1.

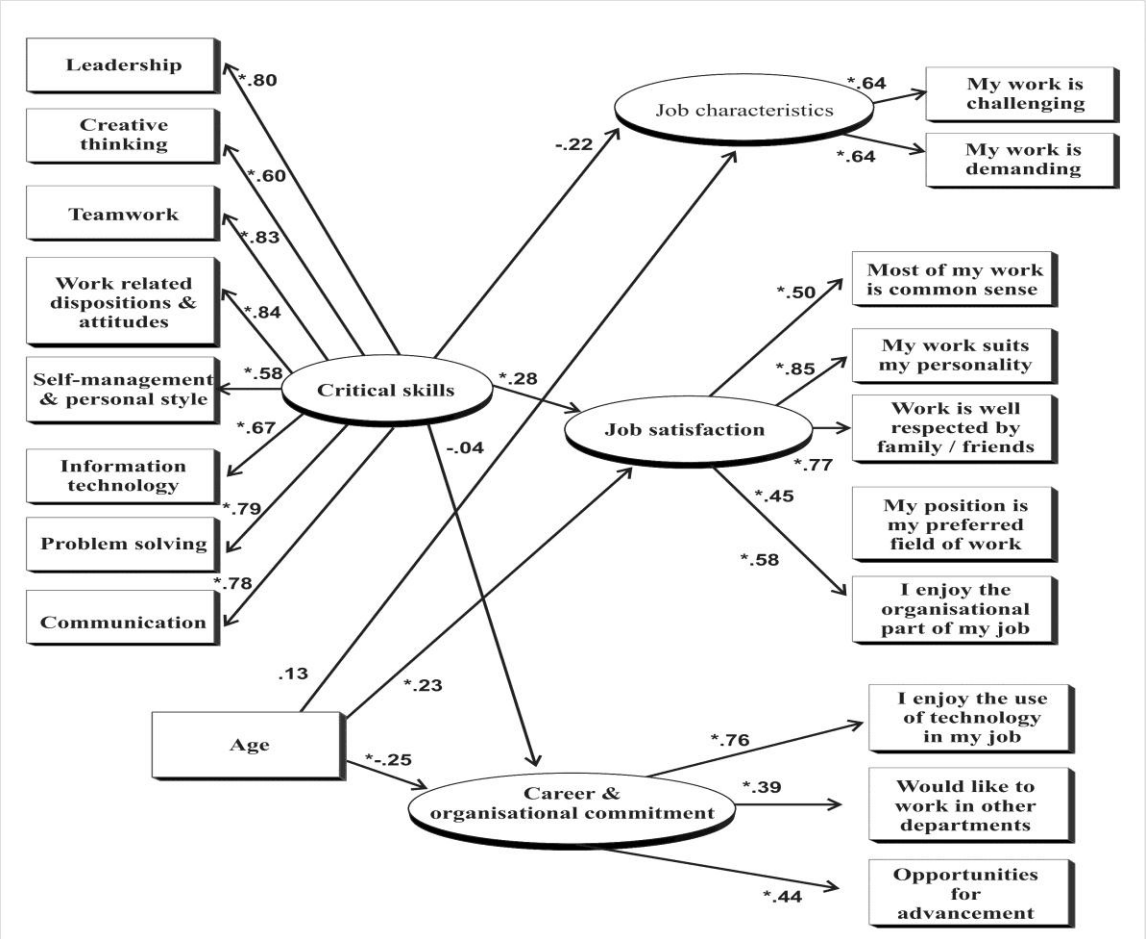

Figure 1: Critical skills, age and work perspectives of resort employees
*Statistically significant on 5% level of significance (≤ 0.05)

The standardized regression weights (β) (as depicted in Figure 1) indicate that critical skills have a statistical significant relationship with job satisfaction, and a non-statistical significant relationship with job characteristics and career and organizational commitment. However, it is still important to report the non-statistical

significant relationships, as it contributes to literature. According to Marsh *et al.* (2004) and Martens (2005), approximating observed data is acceptable, as this could result in key contributions to literature in the studied subject field. Furthermore, age has a statistical significant relationship with job satisfaction and career and organizational commitment, but not with job characteristics.

There is much agreement amongst social scientists to report multiple fit indices as part of model fit identification (Weston and Gore, 2006). The SEM in Figure 1 has produced an x^2/df = 3.81. However, finding an exact fit is rare; it is therefore important to report multiple fit indices, as suggested by MacCullum and Austin (2000) and McDonald and Ho (2002). Two additional fit indices (in addition to the x^2/df) are presented, namely the CFI = 0.82 and a RAMSEA value of 0.94 with a 90% confidence interval of 0.086 and 0.095.

Findings and practical implications

Based on the statistical analysis, the factor analysis shows that job characteristics obtained the highest mean, followed by job satisfaction. Eight critical skills have been identified in this study, of which self-management and personal style skills achieved the highest mean of the identified critical skills. Findings will be based on the SEM's results and practical implications will be made to each finding.

The first finding is that there is no statistically significant association between age and job characteristics; therefore, employees of different ages do not experience job characteristics differently. According to Kooij *et al.* (2011), job characteristics are related to "achievement", "use of critical skills", "autonomy", "contributing to society", "job security" and "increase with age". They continue by stating that job characteristics that are related to "challenges" in the work environment, "promotion", "working with people" and "recognition" decrease with age. Their research contradicts the finding of the association between age and job characteristics. This could imply that employees do not see the progress within the company and that their aging implies different work-related challenges and skills; in essence it also implies the absence of career path planning.

The second finding is that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between age and job satisfaction. Older employees are more experienced in their work environment, which thus contributes to an increase in job satisfaction, in contrast with younger employees, who is just starting to build a career in the hospitality sector. This finding is somehow supported, as some bivariate and multivariate studies on the relationship between age and job satisfaction have found positive relationships or associations between the age of employees and job satisfaction (Sarker *et al.,* 2003; Groot and Van Den Brink, 1999). Management should therefore pay attention to employees' needs, motives and career path planning. Some studies have found that job satisfaction is U-shaped in age, with young employees showing higher levels of morale, which declines after years of work (as novelty wears off), and that satisfaction with one's job rises again in later life when employees are accustomed to the work environment (Herzberg *et al.,* 1957; Trever, 2001). This study therefore contradicts the latter.

The third finding is that there is a positive statistically significant association between age, career and organizational commitment. This finding supports the notion that older employees are more committed to their career in the hospitality sector than younger employees. Related literature suggests that the work environment perceptions of employees of different generations might have an influence on organizational commitment or work values in the hospitality sector (Lub *et al.,* 2012; Chen and Choi, 2006). The fact that age (various generations) differences impact all areas of operational management, recruitment, management style, working arrangements, job satisfaction and organizational commitment could be important to managers or owners of resorts (McDonald and Hite, 2008; Tulgan, 2003). This supports the finding of the association

between age, career and organizational commitment.

The fourth finding shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between critical skills and job characteristics. The results indicate that critical skills do not have an influence on participants' perception of job characteristics. A study by Baum (2006) has found variations in the notion of job characteristics, job status, critical skills, careers and career opportunities, vocational commitment and skills development between hospitality employees in developed and developing countries. This supports the finding of the relationship between critical skills and job characteristics.

The fifth finding is that there is a positive statistically significant association between critical skills and job satisfaction. This finding could be explained by the notion that employees who possess a variety of critical skills and are more educated, experience an increase in job satisfaction. Hospitality work has been found to be complex and challenging, incorporating both the good and the bad of service work. The demanding aspects of the job itself are demonstrated in the utilization of skills, creating memorable experiences for patrons and reaping the benefits of repeat business of those patrons (Pizam and Shani, 2009; Crick and Spencer, 2010). In the hospitality service sector, the application of a variety of critical skills is essential, but cannot warrant customer satisfaction. Quality services can only be provided by hospitality employees who utilize critical skills, which might lead to customer satisfaction. Making use of a variety of critical skills and the application thereof in the hospitality workplace could lead to employees being satisfied with their work. That, in turn, could relate to employee job satisfaction (Gu and Sen Siu, 2008). This supports the finding of the association between critical skills and job satisfaction, and enforces the importance of on-the-job training, as a high percentage of employees at these resorts only have a high school certification.

The sixth finding is that there is no statistically significant effect between critical skills, career and organizational commitment. This finding suggests that critical skills do not have an influence on career and organizational commitment. Furthermore, the finding could be interpreted that it does not matter how many critical skills employees have; the important matter is the employees' norms and values and their commitment to their work environment. Once again, career path planning should address this in order to ensure that employees remain motivated and enthusiastic about their jobs. Meliou and Maroudas (2011) find that hospitality employees value critical skills higher than technical skills. Critical skills are rated as very important for career commitment and these competencies are considered as the most important factor that leads to career development and organizational commitment (Chan and Colemon, 2004). This finding contradicts the finding of the effect between critical skills and career and organizational commitment.

Conclusion, limitation and suggestions for future research

The aim of the study has been to investigate the association between age, critical skills and work perspectives as perceived by resort employees. The results indicate that there is an association between identified factors (c.f. 4.5). This study contributes to the literature of hospitality and human resource management. The strengths of the study is that the results of the authors have delivered a rich set of data which requires human resource managers in the hospitality sector to identify strategies for future human resource practices and to incorporate the findings of this study into their future strategies. The results portray an industry where (a) different ages do not experience job characteristics differently; (b) older employees with more experience are more satisfied with their jobs than younger employees; (c) older employees are more committed to their career than younger employees; (d) critical skills do not have an influence on job

characteristics; and (e) employees who possess a variety of critical skills experience an increase in job satisfaction. The study has a limitation which is acknowledged by the authors. A stratified sampling technique has been employed during the survey, therefore the results are only applicable to the study population that participated in this study and cannot be generalized. More research is thus needed to explore the associations between age, critical skills and work perspectives in various hospitality jobs and sub-sectors thereof. A series of future research possibilities should include conducting research on critical skills and work perspectives among previously disadvantaged ethnic groups and employees with disabilities (Jasper and Waldhart, 2012) in the broader hospitality sector, and doing an international study in collaboration with other developing countries such as Thailand and South America, which are also popular tourism destinations, that may include employees in the commercial sector such as hotels, restaurants, pubs, fast food and take-out restaurants, travel catering, banquet, event catering and guesthouses.

Ensuring effective, sustainable transformation and development of employees in the hospitality sector of the tourism industry in developing Sub-Saharan countries such as South Africa, skills development (Kaplan, 2004) and upliftment of employees by means of on-the-job training, short courses and involvement of the South African Government in training will equip employees with the necessary critical skills and work perspectives that could broaden their prospects within a career in the hospitality sector. Managers in the diverse hospitality sector will benefit by retaining their employees.

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