



An exploration of the internal communication practices in hotels of Gauteng province, South Africa

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Abstract

This study was conducted to explore the communication practices in hotels. A cross-sectional survey research design was used in which self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data from seven employees representing different sections in the selected hotels. Results indicated that, up to 72%, either agreed or strongly agreed that the main purpose of communication in their company is to get employees to behave in the way top management wants them to. The majority of the respondents, up to 56.5%, agreed or strongly agreed that employees seldom get feedback from managers regarding their performance. The predominant form of communication is the one-way top-down communication approach. Employees' suggestions are generally not considered and often managers do not give feedback to employees regarding their performance. Factors that significantly impact on the internal communications practices in the hotel industry includes race, salary levels and work experience. The study also found that internal communication takes place among employees, between departments and between management and employees.

Keywords: communication, management styles, hotels, managers, employees

Introduction

Communication, which is a means of transmitting and disseminating information in an organisation, is an important prerequisite for success in business (Răducan & Răducan, 2014). It is important because it can enhance the smooth running and performance standards of a business (Yoo et al., 2014). Excellent communication among members of staff and between employees and clients is fundamental to the success of a hotel establishment, considering that customers don't only pay for the brand, but also for the food, facilities and services. It is important for any hotel establishment to build a truly loyal customer base and to ensure that high value customers form relationships with multiple service workers at the establishment (Bove & Johnson, 2000). Communications in hotel establishments is crucial in two major areas: the customer service communication and the "behind the scenes" staff and management communications. The "behind the scenes" communications are often referred to as the internal communication while the customer service communication is referred to as external communication. External communication focuses on the audiences outside of the organisation (Saunders, 1999), whereas internal communication refers to communication between employees and the employer and among employees (Hopkins, 2006). Effective communication in a hotel establishment occurs only if the receiver of information understands the exact information or idea that the sender intended to transmit (Mistry et al, 2008). According to Yoo et al., (2014), effective internal communication involving internal stakeholders such as employees, management, and owners can contribute to positive internal relationships in a hotel which in turn leads to cohesion in which everyone is focused on the same goals and objectives. On the other hand, ineffective internal communication, on the other hand, is counterproductive and poses a threat to organisational interpersonal relationships (Young-Gul et al., 2014).

Managers are often required to possess the ability to establish effective communication processes in hotel establishments and lead a work force which culturally and linguistically



diverse employees. This is often a challenge to hotel managers globally and in South Africa in particular (Fidelis & James, 2013).

The South African work environment is highly segmented and challenging, and consists of characteristics of both that of developed and developing countries (Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2003). Current constitutional, legal and societal requirements in South Africa have motivated many organisations to implement unbiased, democratic and representative policies and structures in the workplace. With this new democratic dispensation, business leaders are compelled to focus on how to improve and implement diversity in the workplace in a manner that will strengthen, rather than weaken, the operations of businesses (Fidelis & James, 2013). The diverse sociodemographic nature of the South African workplace means many hotel establishments are confronted with various communication challenges and overcoming these challenges will require certain managerial skills and awareness (Samovar et al., 2013). In the past, many hotel establishments were too focused on external communication that is, serving the customer, and neglected the importance and quality of internal communication (Clarke et al., 2009). Given that hotel employees in South Africa are from diverse sociocultural, linguistic and economic and ethnic backgrounds (Bornman, 2006) and the fact that very little information regarding the internal communication practices in hotels is available, there is a need to explore the internal communication practices of hotels in South Africa. The aim of this study is, therefore, to explore the internal communication practices in selected hotels in the Pretoria and Johannesburg metropolitan areas, South Africa. Findings from this study will provide new insight on the current internal communication practices in hotels which will be of use to stakeholders in the industry.

Literature review

Barriers to communication practices

Communication barriers in a hotel establishment can occur as a result of physical separation as well as gender, social, cultural, linguistic and ethnic differences among employees. Barriers to communication between employees, managers and their subordinates can contribute to ineffective management of employees who belong to diverse demographic groups (Potts & Reynolds, 2010). Poor organisational ideas and poor listening have been identified as the most serious barriers to internal communication. Others include a breakdown in understanding or variation of meaning and improper communication channels, as well as distractions such as noise, inadequate illumination and ventilation (Ballard & Seibold, 2006). In order to enhance communication in a hotel establishment, hotel employees need to develop “hospitality language” skills, whether in English or another language (Blue & Harun, 2003). Eisenberg (2010) also identified four types of barriers to communication, namely: process, physical, semantic and psychosocial barriers.

Process barriers to communication: This is the bureaucratic steps through which information must pass from the sender to the receiver (Abdullah & Antony, 2012). Examples of process communications includes situations where information intended for the employees must pass through their line managers and supervisors. This is related to the chain of command and information dissemination in an organisation (Shaw, 2011). For effective and good communication in a hotel establishment, it is very important to follow the communication processes, because a breakdown anywhere along the line of communication can hamper understanding between employees as well as between employees and management (Lunenburg, 2010). Furthermore, if any intended message does not reach the actual receiver, then that communication becomes ineffective (Shaw, 2011).

Physical barriers to communication: Any physical distractions that interfere with the process of communication such as internet loss, telephone call, drop-in visitors, distances between people, walls, static on the radio, communication by fax and many others are said to be physical barriers to communication (Lunenburg, 2010). In hotel establishments, physical



barriers to communication can also be triggered by an accent, for example, the accent of an offshore-outsourced call centre agent, which can, in turn, reduce customer satisfaction and loyalty (Thelen et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2013).

Semantic barriers to communication: A semantic barrier to communication is caused by the usage of certain words that is not well understood by one of the parties during a communication. Certain words may be interpreted differently by different people in a hotel establishment (Lunenburg, 2010). To curb semantic barriers to communication, it is important for the employer to know the sociodemographic and linguistic diversity of employees within their establishments (Illes & Mathew, 2015).

Psychosocial barriers to communication: A psychosocial barrier to communication is caused by a psychological distance between people and this is similar to actual physical distance. It can occur in a situation where a hotel manager, who often talks harshly to his/her employees cause these employees to develop feelings of bitterness and withdrawal. This separates the manager from the employees, thereby hindering opportunity for effective internal communication in the hotel (Antos, 2011). Inappropriate choice of words, used by managers during communication with employees, can instil fear and anxiety in employees, thereby rendering these employees psychologically separated from their managers (Constantin & Baiase, 2015). Employees can also become psychologically separated whenever managers speak to them in a repressive manner and this suppresses the employees' ability to communicate freely (Dawson et al., 2014). The cultural background has also been reported to affect how one responds to communication in a multicultural organisation. This is because one's tone of speech can be perceived differently by different cultures. Different emphases are placed on certain words in different culture so as to have different meanings (Naidoo, 2011).

Interpersonal communication skills

Interpersonal communication skills are defined as verbal and non-verbal means of communicating with other people. Such skills may be used in face-to-face situations or at a distance through various communication technologies (Lolli, 2013). Friendly interactions has been found to create customer loyalty, as it influences the way customers perceive the quality of service offered by an establishment (Olannye, 2014; Naidoo, 2011). Interpersonal relationships within the work environment are, however, governed by personality traits inherent in the employee (Ulrich, 2010). Effective use of interpersonal communication skills motivates guests to continue to patronise the services of a particular hotel establishment (Bamporiki, 2010). On the other hand, ineffective use of interpersonal communication skills can lead to a dysfunctional internal communication system and this may, in turn, lead to customer dissatisfaction and loss of business. In such as a situation, training through team building exercises can help management to impart the relational and intercommunication skills needed by employees to run the operations of an organisation successfully (Martin, & Barnard, 2013). Interpersonal communication within a diverse workforce environment can contribute immensely in achieving high employee performance and productivity (Okoro & Washington, 2012). In a diverse or multicultural environment, misunderstanding can easily occur, owing to differences in communication abilities (Naidoo, 2011). Thus, culture plays a pivotal role in interpersonal communication considering that it can influence the thoughts and behaviours of employees in an establishment (Beebe et al., 2011).

Methodologies

Study area

This study was conducted in the Gauteng province in South Africa, specifically in the Pretoria and Johannesburg metropolitan areas. Three provinces, namely Gauteng, Kwazulu-Natal and the Western Cape have been described as the economic power houses of South Africa, as



these provinces, combined, contribute over 60% to the GDP of the country. Out of this percentage, Gauteng is said to contribute more than 20% of the 60% (Stats SA, 2014). Even though the land size of Gauteng is the smallest in South Africa (1.5%), its economic contribution to the country is higher than any other province. Gauteng is the most cosmopolitan province in South Africa, harbouring individuals from diverse racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds; therefore, communication skills is of vital importance in the workplace, particularly in the hotel industry owing to the fact that, it brings together people of different backgrounds from South Africa and abroad (Bamporiki, 2010).

Questionnaire instrument

A self-administered structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from the respondents in this study. The 17 questions on the questionnaire was designed to solicit 8 different responses on the sociodemographic information of the respondents, 3 responses on information that relates to the hotels and 11 responses on the internal communication practices in the hotels in which the participants work. These responses from the participants were captured on a 5-point Likert scale. A pilot study was carried out, to test the validity and reliability of the research instrument used in the study. Two hotels located in Johannesburg and two hotels located in Pretoria were used for pre-testing of the research instrument. Three managers and five employees took part in the pilot study where the weaknesses and ambiguities in the questionnaire were rectified. All the faults identified during the pilot study were corrected before the real data collection begun. Internal consistency of constructs was established with an estimated Cronbach's alpha value of 0.7 as a minimum acceptable standard for reliability. Data collected during the pilot study was not incorporated in to the final data of this study.

Sampling and data collection

Sixty franchised and non-franchised hotels in the Pretoria and Johannesburg metropolis, were randomly selected from a list of selected hotels in these metropolis. Permission and consent of the managements of the participating hotels were obtained before the questionnaires were distributed to respondents. Respondents who were nominated by their respective management consisted of four managers from the general section, food and beverage section, housekeeping section and the front office section as well as seven non-management employees from different sections in the hotels took part in the study. Respondents were asked to sign consent forms prior to data collection and they inform the choice to pull out of the study if they so desired. A total of 480 questionnaires were distributed and the filled questionnaires were collected a day after to avoid interference with work duties. Prior to the start of this study, ethical clearance obtained from the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES), University of South Africa.

Data analysis

Responses were captured using the 5-point Likert scale. SPSS software was used to analyse the data, such as the standard deviation, correlation, regression and significance testing was employed using the SPSS software. Descriptive statistics as well as ANOVA was conducted on the variables.

Results

Sociodemographic information of the respondents

In terms of gender, there were an equal number of male and female respondents, 50% each. The majority of the respondents (65.6%) were in the age group 25-40 years, followed by those in the age range 18-24 years (17.2%) and 41-54 years (14.8%), respectively. The majority of the respondents were blacks (70%), followed by whites (24%), then coloureds (5.2%) and, lastly, Indians/Asians (0.8%). Most of the respondents (42.8%) possessed a national diploma



qualification and this was followed by those with Grade 12 certificates (40.8%). Only a few of the respondents possessed a master's degree (1.6%) and a bachelor's degree (5.2%) (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic information of respondents (N=480)

Variables (n)	Frequency (%)	
Gender	Female	124 (49.6)
	Male	125 (50)
	Missing system	1 (0.4)
Age	18-24	43 (17.2)
	25-40	164 (65.6)
	41-54	37 (14.8)
	55-65+	2 (0.8)
	Missing system	4 (1.6)
Race	Black African	175 (70)
	Coloured	13 (5.2)
	White	60 (24)
	Indian/Asian	2 (0.8)
Highest qualification	Grade 12	102 (40.8)
	National diploma	107 (42.8)
	Bachelor's degree	13 (5.2)
	Master's degree	4 (1.6)
	Others	24 (9.6)

The majority of respondents (58.4%) have a formal hospitality-related qualification, while about 40% do not. The front office managers constituted 14.4% of all the respondents. This was followed by the housekeeping managers (8.4%), food & beverage managers (8%), general managers (6%) and lastly, financial managers (0.8%). As many as 60.8% of the respondents were non-managers, most of the respondents (40.8%) were remunerated between R5 000 to R15 000 per month. This was followed by those remunerated between R3 001 and R5 000 (25.6%), R1 to R3 000 (19.2%) and, lastly, those remunerated R15 001+ (8.8%). With regards to work experience, most of the respondents have 1-2 years (34.8%) and 3-4 years (34.8%) experience. Most of the hotels in which the respondents were employed had a 4-star rating (48.8%), followed by those with a 3-star rating (29.6%), 5-star rating (10.8%), 2-star (7.6%) and, lastly, 1-star (1.6%) (Table 2).

Table 2: Employee employment and hotel rating details (N=480)

Variables	Frequency (%)	
Possession of hospitality qualification	Yes	146 (58.4)
	No	100 (40.0)
	Missing system	4 (1.6)
Current job position in hotel	General manager	15 (6)
	Front office manager	36 (14.4)
	Food & beverage manager	20 (8)
	Housekeeping manager	21 (8.4)
	Financial manager	2 (0.8)
	Others positions	152 (60.8)
	Missing system	4 (1.6)
Current salary	R1-3000	48 (19.2)
	R3001-5000	64 (25.6)
	R5001-15000	102 (40.8)
	R15001+	22 (8.8)
	Missing system	10 (4)
Work experience	1-2 years	87 (34.8)
	3-4 years	87 (34.8)
	5+	69 (27.6)
	Missing system	7 (2.8)



Hotel rating of respondents	5-star	27 (10.8)
	4-star	122 (48.8)
	3-star	74 (29.6)
	2-star	19 (7.6)
	1-star	4 (1.6)
	Missing system	4(1.6)

The perception of the general internal communication practices in hotels

The majority of the respondents, up to 72%, either agree or strongly agree that the main purpose of communication in their company is to get employees to behave in the way top management wants them to. 55% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that most communication in their company is one-way, from management to other employees. The majority of the respondents, up to 56.5%, agree or strongly agree that employees seldom get feedback from managers regarding their performance. The majority of the respondents, up to 63.7%, agree or strongly agree that in their hotel establishment, management often uses communication tools to control employees. About half of the respondents (51.4%) strongly disagree or disagree that managers take employees' suggestion into consideration. Less than half of the respondents (37.5%) agree that the communication style of their hotel establishment is appropriate in the context of South Africa's cultural diversity (Table 3).

Table 3: Respondents' perception of internal communication practices in hotels (N=480)

	Frequency of respondents' perceptions (%)					Mean±SD	
	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)		
The main purpose of communication in our company is to get employees to behave in the way top management wants them to	11(4.4)	21(8.4)	35(13.9)	92(36.7)	88(35.1)	4(1.6)	3.99±1.11
Most communication in our company is one-way, from management to other employees	21(8.4)	43(17.1)	41(16.3)	92(36.7)	46(18.3)	8(3.2)	3.41±1.22
Employees seldom get feedback from managers regarding their performance	17(6.8)	49(19.5)	38(15.1)	107(42.6)	35(13.9)	5(2)	3.38±1.16
In this hotel establishment, management often uses communication tools to control employees	11(4.4)	31(12.4)	39(15.5)	105(41.8)	55(21.9)	10(4)	3.67±1.10
Managers take employees' suggestions into consideration	58(23.1)	71(28.3)	34(13.5)	44(17.5)	38(15.5)	6(2.4)	2.73±1.40
The communication style of this hotel suits the cultural diversity of South Africa	13(5.2)	21(8.4)	56(22.3)	94(37.5)	36(14.3)	31(12.4)	3.54±1.06

The ANOVA analysis indicated that there is a link between the race and salary scale of the respondents and their level of agreement as to whether employees get feedback or not from managers regarding their performance. The partial cross-tabulation analysis of the race factor

indicated that up 65% of the blacks, 52% of the coloureds, 40% of the whites and 0% of the Indians agree or strongly agree that employees seldom get feedback from managers regarding their performance.

Similarly, partial cross-tabulation of the salary scale factor indicated that up to 74% of those earning between R3001-R5000, 56% of those earning between R5001-R15000, 51% of those earning between R1-R3000 agree or strongly agree that employees seldom get feedback from managers regarding their performance. Similarly, a link could be identified between the work experience of the respondents and their level of agreement as to whether management uses communication tools to control employees. Partial cross tabulation indicated that 75% of respondents with work experience of 5 years and above, 67% with work experience of 1-2 years and 57% with work experience of 3-4 years agree or strongly agree that management often uses communication tools to control employees (Table 4).

TABLE 4: ANOVA of respondents' perceptions of internal communication practices in hotels within the different groups: gender, age, race, hospitality qualification, current position, salary scale and work experience (N=480)

	ANOVA between groups (p-value)						
	Gender	Age	Race	Hospitality qualification	Current positions	Salary scale	Work experience
The main purpose of communication in our company is to get employees to behave in the way top management wants them to.	0.592	0.425	0.563	0.866	0.956	0.660	0.178
Most communication in our company is one-way, from management to other employees.	0.442	0.307	0.428	0.521	0.149	0.127	0.291
Employees seldom get feedback from managers regarding their performance.	0.514	0.404	0.004 ^{pct1}	0.207	0.188	0.042 ^{pct2}	0.466
In this hotel establishment, management often uses communication tool to control employees.	0.782	0.383	0.253	0.427	0.462	0.925	0.013 ^{pct3}
Managers seldom take employees' suggestions into consideration.	0.180	0.924	0.541	0.438	0.065	0.465	0.230
The communication style of this hotel suits the cultural diversity of South Africa.	0.126	0.255	0.214	0.070	0.347	0.872	0.934

pct = Partial cross-tabulation; Significance at $p \leq 0.05$.
pct 1 = agree or strongly agree (Blacks [65%], Coloured [52%], White [40], Indians [0%])
pct 2 = agree or strongly agree (R1 - R3000[51%], R3001-R5000[74%], R5001-R15000[56%], R15001-R20000+[45%])
pct 3 = agree or strongly agree (1-2 years[67%], 3-4 years[57%], 5+ years[57%]).



The perception of internal interpersonal communication between management and employees, among employees and across departments in hotels

Nearly half (40.2%) of the respondents indicated that internal communication between management and employees in their hotel establishment is average whilst 9.2% consider the communication between management and the employee as excellent, as against only 9.2% respondents who indicated that, the communication between the management and employee is poor. This result however is based on analysis of results with regard to the information that flows from management to employees and not necessary from both sides representing two-way communication. The majority of the respondents (67.8%) indicated that internal communication among employees in their hotel establishment is average (37%) or above average (30%). Also, the majority of the respondents (71.8%) indicated that internal communication across departments in their hotel establishment is either average (36.7%) or above average (35.1%). Looking at the results, it can be seen that internal communication across departments was judged to be the most efficient, followed by among employees, and, lastly, communication between management and employees (Table 5).

Table 5: The perception of internal interpersonal communication between management and employees, among employees and across departments (N=480)

	Frequency of respondents' judgement (%)						Mean±SD
	(1) Poor	(2) Below average	(3) Average	(4) Above average	Excellent	Missing system	
Between management and employees	23(9.2)	16(6.4)	101(40.2)	81(32.3)	23(9.2)	7(2.8)	3.27±1.04
Between employees	5(2)	22(8.8)	93(37.1)	77(30.7)	43(17.1)	11(4.4)	3.55±0.96
Across departments	9(3.6)	21(8.4)	92(36.7)	88(35.1)	26(10.4)	15(6)	3.43±0.94

An ANOVA analysis indicated a link between gender and respondents' perception of internal interpersonal communication between management and employees. A partial cross-tabulation analysis of the gender factor showed that gender has a significant effect on the perception of internal interpersonal communication between management and employees see table 6. Gender however did not significantly influence the perception of internal interpersonal communication among employees or across departments in the hotels. Conversely, the other sociodemographic factors did not significantly affect respondents' perception of the internal communication practices between management and employees, among employees and across departments (Table 6).

Table 6: ANOVA analysis of the perception of internal interpersonal communication between management and employees, among employees and across departments (N=480)

	ANOVA between groups (p-value)						
	Gender	Age	Race	Hospitality qualification	Current positions	Salary scale	Work experience
Between management and employees	0.037 ^{pct1}	0.261	0.746	0.322	0.080	0.570	0.193
Among employees	0.307	0.534	0.402	0.092	0.490	0.293	0.611
Across departments	0.313	0.837	0.702	0.271	0.166	0.840	0.855

pct = Partial cross-tabulation, significance at $p \leq 0.05$

pct1: = above average or well-off (female [39%] & male [61%]).



The impact of internal communication practices of managers on employees

Comparatively, an appreciable percentage (31.1%) of the respondents indicated that, their manager's communication practice often hampers the employees job performance as against relatively low percentage (22.7%) of respondents who indicated that their manager's communication practice never hampers the employees job performers. Analysis of the results also show that as much as 32.3% of the respondents perceive that the internal communication practice of their managers rarely empowers employees as oppose to 17.4% of respondents who are of the view that, the communication practice of the managers always empowers employees. Up to 42.2% of the respondents do perceive that the managers' communication practice rarely creates employee morale whilst only 8.0% of respondents indicates that, their managers' communication practice always creates morale among employees. It is however interest to note from the analysis that, appreciable percentage (41%) of respondents do argue that, their manager's communication practice rarely leads to poor employee customer relationship as compared to 16.3% who indicated that their manager's communication practice leads to creation of poor employee-customer relationships (Table 7).

Table 7: The perceived effect of internal hotel communication practices of managers on employees (N=480)

	Frequency severity descriptors (%)					Mean±SD
	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Often (3)	Always (4)	Missing system	
Hampers employees' job performance	57(22.7)	75(29.9)	78(31.1)	28(11.2)	13(5.2)	2.32±0.97
Create employee morale	47(18.7)	106(42.2)	53(21.1)	20(8.0)	25(10)	2.20±0.87
Poor employee-customer relations	75(29.9)	103(41)	41(16.3)	17(6.8)	15(6)	2.0±0.88
Employee empowerment	34(13.5)	81(32.3)	70(27.9)	43(17.1)	23(9.2)	2.5±0.96

The ANOVA analysis showed that the age factor significantly influences respondents' perceptions with regard to how the communication practices of their superiors impacts on employee-customer relationships. The partial cross-tabulation analysis of the age factor indicated that up to 74% of those aged 18-24, 89% of those aged 25-40, 61% of those aged 41-54 and 50% of those aged 55+ indicated that the communication practices of their superiors never or rarely contributed to poor employee-customer relationships. All the other sociodemographic factors did not influence respondents' perceptions (Table 8).

Table 8: ANOVA analysis of the perceived impact of the internal communication practices of managers on employees (N=480)

	ANOVA between groups (p-value)							
	Gender	Age	Race	Educatio n	Salary	Current positions	Work experience	Hotel rating
Hampers employees' job performance	0.818	0.317	0.549	0.759	0.182	0.696	0.434	0.240
Create low employee morale	0.321	0.482	0.486	0.938	0.3.51	0.794	0.502	0.269
Poor employee-customer relations	0.781	0.008^{pct1}	0.160	0.527	0.223	0.264	0.295	0.142
Employee empowerment	0.860	0.367	0.162	0.221	0.301	0.439	0.494	0.401

pct = Partial cross-tabulation, significance at $p \leq 0.05$.

pct1 = never or rarely (74% of those aged 18-24, 89% of those aged 25-40, 61% of those aged 41-54, 50% of those aged 55+)



Discussions

Sociodemographic information of respondents

There is a good balance with regard to gender representation among the respondents in the hotels that were part of this study. This result, however, differs from the findings of Gursoy et al., (2013), who reported that the hotel industry employs more females than males. It must however be noted that, the results of the current study show that there are more males than females in management positions in the hotels used in this study which agrees well with findings of Martin and Barnard (2013) who reported that, generally, there are more males in management positions than females in the hotel industry. With regard to the racial groups represented in this study, the sociodemographic information shows that blacks constitute the largest racial group that is employed by the hotels that participated in this research. The ratio of different races employed by the hotels, as found in the study, is in line with South African national racial groupings as reported by Stats SA (2014), in that blacks makes up the largest racial group (70%), white (24%), coloured (5.2%) and Indians (0.8%) in Gauteng. This finding is in agreement with the finding of the study by Martin and Barnard (2013) who found that, the employment rate of South Africa on racial lines is in line the national demographics of South Africa.

Females should be well represented at all levels in the workforce of any establishment considering the fact that the female population generally constitutes a considerable proportion of a population (Baum, 2013). A study conducted in Kenya, however, showed that the number of females employed in the hotel industry was three times higher compared to the number of males employed. This, according to the study, is due to the perception that food and beverage services and housekeeping services are seen as female-related activities (Kooime et al., 2013). Often, gender inequities are not caused by organisational policies, but are rather influenced by certain cultural and traditional practices, which assign different roles for males and females (Masadeh, 2013). In a cosmopolitan, democratic and multicultural society like Gauteng, it is therefore not surprising to have a representative balance with regard to the gender of the employees.

The majority of the respondents had either a high school or post-high school certificate or diploma qualification. This finding is generally in line with Statistics South Africa's (2014) report on the educational or literacy level of South Africans, which states that the majority of the employees in the country have a high school qualification (Senior Certificate/Matric) as their highest qualification. The result of this study is similar to the findings by Gursoy et al., (2013), who indicated that a large number of hotel employees in the USA are high school graduates. Most hotels prefer to employ people with a school leaving certificate, as they can provide them with specialised in-service training and this may also be the reason for the very low number of employees with university qualifications (Liu, 2013). The prevalence of lower qualifications among employees in the hotel industry can also be linked to the low salary levels offered by the industry. University graduates are less likely to accept low salaries and are also less likely to want to start employment at a lower rank position (Miles, & Muuka, 2011). The odd working hours within the hotel industry also not appealing to graduates (Okoro & Washington, 2012).

A huge proportion of the respondents did not have any qualifications specialising in the hospitality industry and this can be attributed to the fact that, hotel employers provide employees with hands-on-training and coaching and they empower their employees through effective communication to ensure that service delivery is up to the standard required by the hotel. Thus, owing to this in-house training, hotel employers prefer to employ people who have lower qualifications, as the hotel (employer) can offer a lower salary and train the person to meet the hotel's standard instead of employing someone with higher qualifications, who will expect a higher salary and who still has to be trained to suit the needs of the hotel. (Chung & Ayupp, 2010). Nevertheless, the possession of a hospitality qualification can complement their



on-the-job training, thereby enhancing their knowledge and skills much faster, when compared to employees without a hospitality qualification (Liu, 2013).

The fact that most of the managers were either food and beverage or housekeeping managers could be attributed to the fact that the core business of the hotel industry is accommodation and food and beverage services (Taal, 2012). The fact that close to 40% of the respondents earned a salary of not more than R5, 000 per month is an indication of the generally low salary levels offered by the hotel industry in the Johannesburg and Pretoria metropolitan areas. However, these amounts are higher than the 2014/15 stipulated minimum wage of R2, 900.00 for the hospitality industry in South Africa (Department of Labour, 2013).

The perception of the general internal communication practices in hotels

The majority of the respondents either agree or strongly agree that the purpose of communication in their organisation is to control employees and to get employees to behave in the way top management wants them to. Thus, management uses better communication practice that leads to understanding between management and workers to achieve the vision and mission of the hotel (Gursoy et al., 2013). Employees are conversant with the fact that managers provide the direction in which the organisation has to move and that employees understand their roles in achieving the set objectives of their hotel establishments (Constantin & Baiase, 2015). This also facilitates two-way communication and makes employees understand that their involvement in ensuring the success of the organisation cannot be underestimated (Lunenborg, 2010).

Fifty-five (55%) percent of the respondents either agree or strongly agree that communication in their hotels is mostly one-way, from management to other employees. In other words, one-way communication was the predominant style of communication in these hotels. It must however be noted that, the two-way communication has been found to be more satisfying than one-way communication by most organisations. The preferred communication style at most hotels have been indicated as two-ways communication with a mixture of bottom-up, top-down and horizontal communication (Abdullah & Anthony, 2012). A bottom-up communication system allows employees, who are on the frontline of a hotel establishment, to participate when decisions are made that will affect their job and business operations, while horizontal communication allows for the flow of information between people who are on the same level in the business organisation (Young-Gul et al., 2014; Schmidt, 2015). In research conducted by Khirin (2012), at a five star hotel in Thailand, it was shown that communication is a foundational effort of organisational success and everyone in the organisation should have the opportunity to be heard and that bottom-up; top-down and horizontal communication enhances employee relations. Where there is no capacity for feedback from management during communication and communication becomes one-way, the management style automatically becomes an autocratic style of management (Abdullah & Antony, 2012).

The one-way communication style has been found to be less effective, because it does not allow information to flow directly and smoothly where feedback or responses can be made and discussed immediately to achieve the most effective outcome (Bamporiki, 2010). One-way communication in a hotel establishment does not give employees the chance to be heard in the decision-making process or empower them to take actions that are in line with the organisation's strategy (Miles & Muuka, 2011; Argenti, & Forman, 2002). The contribution and impact of positive feedback on an organisation's success cannot be overemphasised, since positive feedback ensures employees' commitment and loyalty to the organisation (Vandenberghe & Panaccio, 2012). The use of effective communication by managers, when carrying out their control functions, ensures proper distribution of information inside the organisation, which ensures that employees stay motivated and satisfied with their job, thereby boosting productivity (Altunas et al., 2013). Many other scholars, including Bartoo and Sias (2004) and Karami (2007), have described internal communication as the main tool to achieve job satisfaction, high motivation levels, job performance and innovation.



Fifty-six (56.5%) percent of the respondents either agree or strongly agree that managers seldom take employees' suggestion into consideration. This implies that a considerable number of employees are of the view that their managers hardly take their suggestion into consideration despite the preference for two-way communication at these establishments. This finding is in line with that of Constantin and Baiase (2015), in which it was found that where employees' suggestions are ignored, the establishment can end up with employees that show a lack of motivation and it can lead to a low staff turnover (Tourish & Hargie, 2004). Paying attention to the suggestions or voices of employees, means there is an appreciation for the exchange of views between the employees and the managers. This gives the employer the opportunity to provide feedback on certain issues that have been raised by employees (Knight & Haslam, 2010; Wilkinson et al., 2004). Similarly, Dundon and Gollan, (2007) found that employees feel less important to their organisation when their views and suggestions are ignored. It has also been reported that organisations that provides the space for employees' voices to be heard are able to avoid job dissatisfaction and low morale among employees (Truss et al., 2006). The big challenge regarding internal communication in hotels is to convince top management that employees need to be informed about the organisational plans, objectives and outcomes (Martin & Barnard, 2013). If employees' suggestions are in line with the organisational plans, objectives and outcomes and if the goals of the organisation are effectively communicated to employees, in advance, employees will feel a sense of belonging and ownership and, hence, they will experience job satisfaction (Abdullah & Anthony, 2012; Khirin, 2012).

Thirty-seven (37.5%) of respondents agree that the communication style of their hotel establishments suits the cultural diversity of South Africa. This implies that a substantial number of employees feel the communication styles in hotels are not in line with the cultural diversity of South Africa. It should be noted that South Africa is a culturally diverse country with eleven official languages and, in a case where a particular language is selected in which to communicate, it is important to take cultural diversity and its implications into account or communication may not be effective (Varner & Beamer, 2005). Cultural and linguistic diversity, if not properly managed, can lead to misunderstandings and communication barriers between management and employees and among employees and this can hamper productivity (Lunenburg, 2010; Brun, 2010).

The number of years of work experience also significantly affected how respondents answered the query as to whether communication tools are used by management to control employees. In this regard, thirty-four (34.8%) percent of those who have 1-2 years of work experience either agrees or strongly agrees while only a small majority of those who have worked for 3-4 years or more agree or strongly agree. This could be attributed to the fact that employees who have more work experience are more abreast with all aspects of their hotel's operations and culture, including the communication processes (Illes & Mathew, 2015). Gaps in communication between management and employees (Madera et al., 2013) can cause employees to become less motivated and nurse the perception of being controlled and being used (Zivrbule, 2015).

Race and the salary scale of employees significantly determined the way the respondents answered the query as to whether they get feedback from their managers regarding their work performance. Differences among people from different racial backgrounds or cultures, who work together, can lead to friction, poor interpersonal relationships and miscommunication. This can make employees to ignore feedbacks given to them and therefore loose valuable information needed in the feedbacks (Olannye, 2014; Mishra et al., 2014). The provision of proper feedback can be used as tool to bridge the gap between people of different backgrounds within an establishment such as a hotel (Begin & Charbonneau, 2012). In this study, the majority of the blacks and coloureds either agree or strongly agree that they seldom get feedback. Most blacks and coloureds earn low wages and find themselves as subordinates to mostly white managers. Thus these groups of hotel employees who are usually low salary



earners find themselves at the receiving end of orders and tend to behave and act alike with information received (Naidoo, 2011). As a result, these two groups of employees, who normally do not form part of management, often feel that they are being treated as less important employees, whilst the managers, who earn higher salaries, often get the attention of the employer (Mohamad, 2008).

The perception of internal communication from management to employees, among employees and across departments in hotels.

Forty (40%) percent of respondents indicated that, the communication between the management and the employees in their hotels is either average. It is worthy to note that this percentage basically reflects the frequency of transmission dissemination of information from management to employees and not from the employee to management as well, thus, the frequency of one-sided flow of information.

Sixty-seven (67.8%), percent of respondents indicated that the internal communication among employees, in their hotels is either average or above average. This is a good observation for a hotel establishment considering that most of the employees are in the frontline of the business, whereby internal communication is imperative for success (Dawson et al., 2014). Effective communication among employees will impact positively on the two-way communication between employees and customers as employees turn to give the same information or image of the hotel to the visiting customers. Thus two-way communication ensures that front line employees, who continuously interact with customers, represent the correct values, vision and mission of the organisation (Clampit & Downs, 2009). It is worth mentioning that the use of two-way communication in hotels can prevent the occurrence of a lack of trust and low morale among employees, thereby ensuring optimum productivity (Haywood, 2003). Furthermore, managers who encourage the practise of two-way communication among employees, eliminate misunderstanding among employees (Gursoy et al., 2013). Good internal communication among employees in hotels means that employees are more receptive with regard to communication among themselves, feeling free to discuss issues among themselves (Brawley & Pury, 2015). Internal communication among employees has been found to be high in hotel organisations (Bederson & Quinn, 2012, Marshall & Shipman, 2013; Martin, & Barnard, 2013; Schmidt, 2015). The sharing of information among employees helps employees to bond with each other and also helps them to identify with the organisation they work for (Chandler et al., 2014). Internal communication among employees is reported to improve employees' levels of job satisfaction and loyalty to the organisation (Constantin & Baiase, 2015; Ahmet et al., 2014). In this study, 71.8% of respondents also indicated that the communication across their departments is either average or above average. Various departments in a hotel, such as the front office, food and beverage and housekeeping, have different core mandates, but are integrated. Therefore, there must be constant or regular communication across these departments (Doukakis, 2003). Many hotels have been found to prefer the two-way communication between departments, because it ensures understanding between the departments and the employees, which enhances performance in the hotel as a whole (Abdullah & Antony, 2012; Dawson et al., 2014, Clampit & Downs, 2009).

The impact of internal communication practices of managers on employees

Fifty-three (53%) percent of the respondents indicated that the communication practices of their superiors either never or rarely hamper their job performances. This means there is a substantial number of respondents who are of the view that the communication practices of their superiors hamper their job performance. A study conducted by To et al (2013) and To et al (2015), on the relationship between internal communication and employee work-related behaviours in a casino, found that good effective communication, particularly the sharing of information, positively affects the work-related attitude of employees. If managers do not communicate properly with their subordinates, their job performance and job satisfaction will



be negatively affected (Mobley, 1982; To et al., 2015). It is important for employees to understand their role and that of the manager's so as to ensure proper communication (Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000).

Sixty (60.9%) percent of respondents indicated that the communication style of their managers either never or rarely leads to morale among subordinate employees. This is typical of a one-way communication relationship, it breeds lack of trust in the employees and do not boosts employees' morale and determination (Mobley, 1982; To et al., 2015). A good employee-customer relationship and satisfactory internal communication process gives employee a sense of belonging (Berezan et al., 2013) and this will, in turn, lead to an increase in customer satisfaction (Gaither, 2012). Good morale among employees translates into good employee-customer relations, thereby ensuring high standards of service, which is typical of a unified team (Kang & Hyunb, 2012).

Of all the sociodemographic factors, only the age factor significantly determined the way respondents judged the impact of managers' communication practises on employee-customer relations. Younger employees tend to agree more that the communication style of their managers never or rarely leads to the creation of poor employee-customer relationships. Each time a rising generation comes of age, it is assumed that their perspectives influence change in society's social mood and direction and this is what actually happens in terms of how older people view their management's communication styles (Twenge et al., 2010). Whereas the younger employees are open to taking instructions through internal communication, the older employees are often resistant to being given instructions (Olannye, 2014). Most often, when employees get familiar with the daily routine of an organisation, they tend to think they know everything about the institution and they develop the tendency to question some instructions and orders given to them, because their importance is being undermined (Okoro & Washington, 2012). Age differences between a manager and the employees in organisations can become a barrier to smooth internal communication where the management's communication style does not accommodate such differences (Petrovic et al., 2014). The chosen internal communication strategies should aim at nothing less than building trust and respect through engagement with all the stakeholders, particularly when the management consists of younger personnel (Mishra et al., 2014).

The majority of respondents also indicated that the communication style of their superiors either never or rarely leads to employee empowerment. A substantial proportion of the respondents in this study were of the view that the way they communicated with their managers does not empower them. Empowerment has been found to make employees become committed to their work, leading to employee job satisfaction (Vandenbergh & Panaccio, 2012) A chosen style of communication by management will not lead to empowerment, if managers do not communicate clearly to employees (Constantin & Baiase, 2015). This is typically the case when managers exhibit an autocratic style of management and, hence, do not give employees some level of autonomy and responsibility for decision making or to express their views (Ogunola et al., 2013). If a communication style that leads to empowering of the employees are not used, employees becomes less responsible and eventually low performance ensues from the hotels operations (Ehiobuche & Tu, 2012). In organisations where there is a culture of providing effective feedback, employees are seen to be more responsible and productive and they harbour a sense of belonging in the organisation (Okoro & Washington, 2012).

Conclusions

There is a good balance in ration between the number male and female in the hotels. The predominant internal communication style in most of the hotels studied is a one-way, top-down style of communication. The results indicate that this preferred internal communication style creates the impression of a lack of respect for employees, by management, in the hotel industry. The findings also indicate that managers don't give feedback to their employees on



their job performance. Factors that significantly impact on the internal communications practices in the hotel industry includes race, salary levels and work experience. The study also found that internal communication takes place among employees, between departments and between management and employees.

Recommendations

It is recommended that hotel managers should employ more liberal ways of communicating with their employees, as the one-way, top-down approach, as seen from the findings, hampers employee job performance, creates low employee morale, leads to poor employee-customer relations and affects employee empowerment. Besides this, managers should give employees the opportunity to offer feedback and also take employees' suggestions into consideration, as the results indicate that respondents strongly perceive that managers rarely take employees' suggestions into consideration. The findings also show that employees seldom get feedback from managers regarding their performance. It is therefore recommended that hotel managers should from time to time, institute internal communication processes that will ensure that feedback is provided to employees on their performance.

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