



doi 10.5281/zenodo.6989391

Vol. 04 Issue 05 May - 2021

Manuscript ID: #0492

## MINDFULNESS AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT OF HOSPITALITY FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE

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### ABSTRACT

*Wholesome emotion and emotional attention of employees are evident when seeking mindfulness of such employees as it regards their engagement. This research work seeks to address issues relating to the mindfulness of employees in hospitality firms in Rivers State. Two hypotheses were stated and tested using Pearson's Correlation Coefficient via SPSS of the ten hospitality firms. Ninety-nine (99) copies of the questionnaire were returned and analyzed out of the one hundred and fifteen (115) submitted. It was concluded that hospitality firms because of the sensitivity of the kind of services they render should incorporate mindfulness into the employee engagement process through employee emotional attention and wholesome emotion as this would drive the success of such firms. It was thus recommended that: Hospitality firms should make policies that would be with strict employee emotional attention emotion for it to find employees that are apt and suitable when engaging employees. Given that hospitality firms can only get the best out of their employees when they are properly engaged; these firms should employ ways to get the wholesome emotions of their employees as their mindfulness is considered.*

### KEYWORDS

*Mindfulness, Employee engagement, Wholesome emotion and Emotional attention.*



## INTRODUCTION

In engaging capable, knowledgeable, and competent workforce, firms must source, hire, and retain people that can manage their mental health or simply gain more enjoyment from life. Employee engagement is a vital driver of firm's success, but it is a multifaceted concept. Various elements influence employee engagement at its implementation level (individual, group, and organizational). Success of the firm lies in identifying those underlying elements which influence employees' mindfulness level that leads to outperforming their competitors (Bezuidenhout & Cilliers, 2010). It is one of the instruments for organizational as well as for employee development (Bezuidenhout & Cilliers, 2010), thus creating a culture of employee engagement is very essential for every firm as it can be treated as an engagement ring for employee from their organization to stay with them for lifetime (Bothma & Roodt, 2012).

For hospitality firms to record higher success rates, it must consider how attentive the employees of their firm would be, by practically learning to be in focused mode more often, it is possible to develop a new habit that helps to weaken old, unhelpful, and automatic thinking habits. For individuals with emotional problems, these old habits can involve being overly pre-occupied with thinking about the future, the past, themselves, or their emotions in a negative way. Mindfulness in this case does not aim to immediately control, remove, or fix this unpleasant experience. Somewhat, it aims to develop a skill to place an employee in a better position to break free of or not buy into these unhelpful habits that cause distress and prevents optimistic action (Baer, 2003).

Baer (2003) noted that mindfulness can simply be noticing what we don't normally notice, because our minds are too busy thinking about the future or about the past - meditating about what we need to do, or going over what we have done. Being mindful helps us to train our emotional attention. Our minds wander about half of the times, but every time we practice being mindful, we are exercising our emotional attention influence and becoming mentally fit by the day. We can take more control over our focus of emotional attention and choose what we focus on rather than passively allowing our emotional attention to be dominated by that which distresses us and takes us away from the present moment.

From the forgoing, numerous research works has been conducted (e.g. Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Baer, 2003) in investigating mindfulness, but there seems to be no empirical study to reveal whether mindfulness influence employee engagement of hospitality firms in Rivers State. Based on the gap in literature identified, our point of departure from previous studies is to fill the gap in literature by determining if mindfulness influences employee engagement in hospitality firms in Rivers State.

### Statement of the Problem

Because the overall mental development and behaviour of the firm strictly depends on the mental development and behaviour of the various individuals that makes up the firm, mindfulness serves as the "cognitive eye" of the employee, therefore the lack of mindfulness in the firm could lead to "organizational blindness".

Most hospitality firms in Rivers State seems to lack adequately qualified employees who are poised to showcase their physical, mental, and emotional capabilities when carrying out their responsibilities (Baer, 2003). Hence, this research work is aimed at raising the consciousness of the hospitality firms to considering increased level of mindfulness as a means of enhancing employee engagement.

## Research Hypotheses

The following research null hypotheses will guide the study:

**Ho<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between emotional attention and employee engagement in hospitality firms in Rivers State.

**Ho<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between wholesome emotion and employee engagement in hospitality firms in Rivers State.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of the study is based on the social awareness theory. This is because, several research works that follow the line of mindfulness has depended heavily on the social awareness theory to reinforce mindfulness theory (e.g., Mayer & Salovey 1997)

## Social Awareness Theory

Social awareness involves the ability of individual workers to understand the consciousness of a worker; that is, what the employee is thinking and recognizing their feelings. Individual workers due to their consciousness learn how to show respect for and understand others' perspectives, emotional states and needs. They learn to participate in positive, safe, and respectful relationships, defining and accepting individual and group roles and responsibilities.

Human beings enter into certain productive, or economic, relations and these relations lead to a form of social consciousness. In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material forces of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society - the real foundation, on which raises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life determines the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is the consciousness of the individual that determines their being, and their social being determines their consciousness as the mind is an organic whole relating to emotional intelligence is that "something" within us that help us to sense how we feel and enables us to truly connect with others and form a bond. It gives us the ability to be present and listen to someone when they most need (Mayer & Salovey 1997). Also, emotional intelligence is that sense of internal balance within the individual that enables them to keep our composure, make good decision, communicate successfully, and maintain effective leadership even under stress. Social awareness is a specifically defined term that really is not open to personal interpretation of what it means.

## Mindfulness

In recognition of the growing scientific and clinical interest in mindfulness, a number of scholars of mindfulness have in recent years made efforts to describe and explain the meaning of mindfulness within the context of organizations (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), makes this clear the practitioner of mindfulness must at times evaluate mental qualities and intended deeds, make judgments about them, and engage in purposeful action. In this way, canonical mindfulness is bringing together capacities of emotional attention and discerning thought to regulate mental states and behaviour. In a state of sustained, receptive attentiveness, evaluations and judgments, memories, and other cognitive operations can be closely attended to, and actively engaged, by a mind that is aware of what is happening moment to moment (Mitchell, 2002). As we will see, it is in the place of thought and

evaluative thought, that represents a major difference between canonical and a number of science-based conceptualizations of mindfulness, a difference that is important to understanding the differing operationalization of mindfulness in scientific understandings.

Bezuidenhout and Cilliers (2010) describes mindfulness as intentional, non-judgmental emotional attention consisting of a self-regulation of emotional attention to maintain focus on present experience, and a purposive, attitudinal orientation toward the present moment that includes, among other features, curiosity, and acceptance. In contrast to these approaches, Bezuidenhout and Cilliers (2010) focus on the deployment of emotional attention that also characterizes the canonical descriptions of basic mindfulness outlined earlier. Bezuidenhout and Cilliers (2010) agree with the other science-based definitions here that non-judgment is part of mindfulness, but they argue that it is inherent in the receptive emotional attention deployed, rather than being a separate attitude. This perspective is concordant with that of Kabat-Zinn (2003) describes mindfulness as things just as they are, unadulterated by habitual reactions and projections. Of particular relevance to both the conceptualization and operationalization of mindfulness is the “non-judgmental” or “acceptance” feature emphasized in most of these scientific definitions and in mindfulness research more broadly. This feature, generally framed as an attitude, represents a departure from canonical mindfulness. Bezuidenhout and Cilliers (2010) has explicitly stated that what is commonly called “acceptance” is not part of mindfulness, as it does not distinguish between wholesome and unwholesome states of mind (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Bezuidenhout and Cilliers (2010) suggest that the non-evaluative, non-judgmental feature highlighted other definitions bears similarity to a non-dual conception of mindfulness that arose centuries after the original, canonical conception. Kabat-Zinn (2003) points out that while non-judgmental wholesome emotion is not an adequate theoretical description of canonical mindfulness, it can be useful as practical instruction in developing mindfulness, to enable a disengagement from habitual mental discursively and reactivity that inhibits sustained attentiveness and the formation of mature discriminative judgments. Thus non judgmentally represents a “skilful means” to enhance mindfulness rather than the thing itself. In this regard it bears noting and framing of mindfulness as non-judgmental emotional attention has had considerable impact on how researchers and clinicians understand the concept, his aim in defining it in this way was in fact to serve practical instruction rather than conceptual precision (Baer, 2003).

### Employee Engagement

Employee engagement as one of the human resources term is synonyms to retaining employees in organization for long. Employee engagement basically means engaging employee to their work, so that maximum output can be resulted from them which will lead to maximum profit. Khan (1990) defined engagement in terms of a psychological state as “the harnessing of organization members to their work role.

In engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances. Engagement is a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization (Kong, 2009). The organization must work to nurture, maintain, and grow engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee. Earlier reference has been made to the extensive literature and research on employee commitment, and the evidence that increased levels of employee commitment are related to improved business performance. Given that commitment ‘works’, and the

similarity of engagement to some aspects of commitment, it would seem to make intuitive sense that engagement also works to bring about business improvements. Some of the companies already using engagement models are beginning to see engagement as 'commitment plus' or 'one step up from commitment', so it is worth spending a little time to understand the relationship between commitment and business performance (Lutz, Slagter, Rawlings, Francis, Greischar, & Davidson, 2009).

Measuring a concept such as engagement is challenging, as it involves attempting to assess complex feelings and emotions. The attitude survey is a useful tool for collecting, measuring and analyzing employee opinions, although it can only be a blunt instrument, given the subtlety and nuances of shades of opinion as it is a considerable improvement on the evidence about employee morale on which decisions have sometimes been made (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010).

### Methodology

The cross-sectional research design was employed in this study because the study has to do with the collection and collation of data and information from respondents at different locations and at different times (Levin, 2006). The population for this study comprises of ten hospitality firms whose employees are the respondents. The reports obtained from the firms, shows a total of one hundred and seventy-one (171) employees among the ten hospitality firms which include: Claridon Hotels, Dannic Hotels, DeEdge Hotel, DotNova Hotels, GrandVennice Hotels, Juanita Hotels, Londa Hotels, Vhelberge Imperial Hotels, Gibsco Hotels, and Labake Hotels. The Instruments for the study was proportionally circulated according to the number of employees of the various firms. The simple random sampling technique was employed in this study in other to ensure that each member of the subset has an equivalent probability of being selected. Krejcie & Morgan (1970) table was used for sample size determination which gave us a sample size of one hundred and fifteen (115) of the ten hospitality firms selected for the study. The validity of this instrument on mindfulness returned good internal consistency with emotional attention item returning a Cronbach Alpha  $\alpha$  value of 0.78, and wholesome emotion showed internal consistency of  $\alpha = 0.71$  in the previous study (Bezuidenhout & Cilliers, 2010). Our reliability was established at 0.7 and above as steps were taken to make sure that the instrument covered all facets of the constructs under study to satisfy the content validity of the instrument (Nunnally, 1978).

### 4.1 Results and Data Analysis

**Table 1: Model Summary for Emotional attention and Employee Engagement**

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	<b>.923<sup>a</sup></b>	.853	<b>.852</b>	.650
a. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional attention				

*Source: SPSS Output*

The output of the model summary above reports a correlation coefficient value of .923<sup>a</sup> indicating the relationship existing between the variables (Emotional attention and employee engagement) also the adjusted R square of .853 (85.3%); (coefficient of determination) indicating the rate of change in employee engagement as explained by Emotional attention.

**Table 2: Model Summary for Wholesome Emotions and Employee Engagement**

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	<b>.938<sup>a</sup></b>	.880	<b>.879</b>	.588
a. Predictors: (Constant), Wholesome Emotions				

*Source: SPSS Output*

The output of the model summary above reports a correlation coefficient value of .938<sup>a</sup> indicating the relationship existing between the variables (wholesome emotions and employee engagement) also the adjusted R square of .879 (87.9%); (coefficient of determination) indicating the rate of change in employee engagement as accounted for by wholesome emotions.

### Test of Stated Null Hypotheses

**Table 3: Regression Analysis of Mindfulness with Employee Engagement**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	6.006	.509		11.810	.000
	Emotional attention	3.174	.110	.923	28.886	.001
a. Dependent Variable: Employee Engagement						

*Source: SPSS Output*

**Decision Rule:** Accept the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>) if the tabulated value is greater than the critical value (P-value) at 0.05 which is the tolerable error of 5%; otherwise accept the alternate hypothesis (Gujarati, 2004).

### H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between emotional attention and employee engagement

The results from the regression analysis indicated that Emotional attention exhibited a significant positive effect on employee engagement ( $\beta = .923$ , 0.01) thus yielding a calculated value of .001 which is less than the P-value set at 0.05 ( $t = .001 < .05$ ) resulting to non-acceptance of the stated null hypothesis (**H<sub>0</sub>**) suggesting that there exists significant relationship between emotional attention and employee engagement.

**Table 4: Regression Analysis of wholesome emotions with employee engagement**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-3.148	.365		-8.612	.000
	Wholesome Emotions	2.588	.080	.938	32.439	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Employee engagement

*Source: SPSS Output***H0<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between wholesome emotions and employee engagement**

The results from the regression analysis indicated that wholesome emotions as the second dimension of employee engagement exhibited a significant positive effect on employee engagement ( $\beta = .856$ , 0.01) thus yielding a calculated value of .000 which is less than the P-value set at 0.05 ( $r = .000 < .05$ ) resulting to non-acceptance of the stated null hypothesis (**H0<sub>2</sub>**) suggesting that there exists significant relationship between wholesome emotions and employee engagement.

**Discussion of Findings**

From the results of the analyses, the null hypotheses were rejected and their alternate stating that: Emotional attention has a significant relationship with employee engagement, as well as wholesome emotion has a significant relationship with employee engagement in hospitality firms in Rivers State; accepted. This result is similar to the studies of the other scholars (e.g. Bezuidenhout and Cilliers, 2010). Bezuidenhout and Cilliers (2010) conducted a survey on the impact of organizational mindfulness and corporate success and concluded that for organizations to experience mindfulness, firms should engage employees that will foster the growth of the organization and that will be achieved with emotional attention and wholesome emotion from the individual employee.

**Conclusions**

Conclusively, hospitality firms because of the sensitivity of the kind of services they render should incorporate mindfulness into the employee engagement process through employee emotional attention and wholesome emotion as this would drive the success of such firms.

**Recommendations**

It was thus recommended that:

- i. Hospitality firms should make policies that would be with strict employee emotional attention for it to find employees that are suitable when engaging employees.
- ii. Given that hospitality firms can only get the best out of their employees when they are properly engaged; these firms should employ ways to get the wholesome emotions of their employees as their mindfulness is considered.

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