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# Inclusive Work Environment and Job Competency Among Hospitality Employees in Class A-Rated Hotels Within Nairobi City County, Kenya

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## Abstract

The hospitality industry is dynamic and diverse, making an inclusive work environment critical for ensuring workforce competency and professional growth. Such an environment not only supports employees but also strengthens their job competency, which is key to maintaining service quality and customer satisfaction. Despite the industry's significant contribution to the Kenyan economy, employee performance challenges remain, including limited support structures, a lack of rewarding practices, and few career development opportunities. These gaps undermine employee efforts and reduce job competency. Previous studies have addressed human resource practices in hospitality. However, insufficient research has examined how specific elements of an inclusive work environment shape job competency in Class A-rated hotels in Nairobi City County. This study focused on evaluating the influence of engaging work environment on job competency. The study adopted an embedded mixed-method design and was conducted in Nairobi City County. The target population was 9,245 employees, and the sample size of 383 respondents was determined using Slovin's formula and systematically distributed across categories. Structured questionnaires were used to collect numerical data, and an interview schedule was used to collect narrative data, with pretesting conducted to ensure reliability and validity. Data analysis involved: quantitative analysis using descriptive and inferential statistics (multiple regression), and qualitative analysis through thematic analysis, with results presented

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in tables, frequencies, and charts. Ethical considerations included voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality, with responses recorded using codes rather than personal identifiers. Study results showed that an engaging work environment significantly influenced hotel employees' job competency, but in different ways. The study concluded that an inclusive work environment plays a significant role in enhancing employees' job competency in Class A-rated hotels. Educational qualifications strengthen employees' ability to benefit from inclusive work environments. Hotel management should strengthen recognition systems, invest in mentorship programmes, promote fairness and psychological safety, enhance communication and employee participation, and establish supportive workplace policies that promote job competency. Also, training and development should be customised to employees' educational levels to maximise job competency, regardless of gender backgrounds.

**Key words:** *Job Competency, Inclusive Work Environment, Engaging Work Environment, Class A-Rated Hotels.*

## 1. Introduction

Kenya's hospitality sector plays a significant role in the national economy, encompassing numerous establishments, including hotels, lodges, restaurants, and travel agencies. It is a key source of employment, tourism, and foreign-exchange earnings generated by this sector. As denoted by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), the percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country by the hospitality and tourism sector in the past years was significant (KNBS, 2023).

Moreover, the hotel industry is a powerhouse of the national economy, and the number of people employed by this industry makes up a huge proportion of the working population in Kenya, as it contributes 10 per cent to national GDP (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Nairobi attracts visitors and business travellers, and this location plays a vital role in this industry. Furthermore, this industry growth has necessitated well-trained staff who can deliver superior services, particularly in the star-rated hotel sector, where goods and services must meet required quality standards (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2023).

Job competency is a holistic concept that refers to a combination of knowledge, skills, and values necessary for a particular profession (Vaitiekunaite, 2022). In the hospitality industry, competencies have been divided into hard and soft skills. Soft competencies include leadership, interpersonal skills, teamwork, communication, values, and personal behavioural traits. On the other hand, hard competencies are considered a collection of technical abilities (Francis et al., 2020). Commey et al. (2020) point out that the most important skills for hospitality employees include effective communication, continuous learning, information management, working well with others, technical know-how, strong ethics, problem-solving, leadership, and entrepreneurial skills. Although the hospitality industry ranks among the major service industries, especially in Kenya, it has faced issues similar to those of other service industries, including a shortage of skilled labour to meet the changing demands of customers. The fact that not all employees in the hospitality industry can communicate their ability to deliver the skills needed to fulfil customer expectations is a growing concern (Oyuna, 2019).

Work environment refers to the physical, social, and psychological factors that together determine a worker's experience and output (Greenberg & Baron, 2021). The core

importance of understanding the work environment of hospitality employees is that their state directly influences their job satisfaction and well-being, and, consequently, can determine organisational performance (Vassou et al., 2024).

An inclusive workplace is a working environment that respects all employees regardless of their backgrounds, makes them feel valued, and gives them equal opportunities to pursue opportunities (Yadnya & Khamiliyah, 2024). Moreover, Vakira et al. (2023) argue that an accommodative work environment not only motivates employees to improve morale and productivity but also enhances hotel performance. Moreover, Wang (2023) found that higher workplace performance is associated with the psychological empowerment that leaders foster among their employees. According to Giousmpasoglou (2024), hospitality employees are more likely to grow and use their abilities successfully in a supportive and inclusive work environment. This research study, therefore, sought to bridge the knowledge gap between inclusive work environments and employee job competency in Class A-rated hotels in Nairobi City County.

### **1.1 Problem statement**

Since the hospitality industry is dynamic and diverse, workplace inclusion is essential for nurturing employees' competence and professional development. This kind of environment serves employees and also improves their job competency, which is important for in-service maintenance and customer satisfaction (Luu & Trong, 2021). Similarly, Giousmpasoglou (2024) found that workers in star-rated hotels are forced to acquire the required skills and refined knowledge to meet the varied demands of clients. Moreover, studies show that an inclusive workplace significantly impacts hospitality employees' capability to develop and sustain their competency at work (Huang et al., 2023). In addition, developing a work environment with an engaging, positive, and caring atmosphere in the hospitality industry can help enhance job satisfaction, skill development, and overall performance (Madera et al., 2023).

Even though the hospitality sector is a crucial contributor to Kenya's economy, workers in this field face difficulties in gaining access to and demonstrating competency in the workplace (Francis et al., 2020). Many workers in star-rated hotels in Kenya complain about the inadequacy of support mechanisms to enhance skill levels, the lack of recognition, and limited access to career development opportunities (Mukolwe et al., 2023). Consequently, their morale is reduced, and they become underestimated, an element that adversely affects their work proficiencies (Madera et al., 2023). Although the employment practices and general nature of work environments in the hospitality industry have been researched in the past, no studies have examined how specific features of an inclusive work environment contribute to competency in the jobs performed by hospitality employees in star hotels in Nairobi. The nexus between an engaging work environment and job competency was also established. This research sought to address the knowledge gap between an engaging workplace environments and job competency.

### **1.2 Objectives of the study**

#### **a) General Objective**

To examine the influence of an inclusive work environment on job competency among employees in Class A-rated hotels within Nairobi City County, Kenya.

### **b) Specific objective**

To evaluate the influence of an engaging work environment on job competency among employees in Class A-rated hotels within Nairobi City County, Kenya.

## **2. Literature review**

An inclusive workplace is one in which all employees, regardless of background or perspective, are equally respected and given equal development opportunities (Rambe, 2024). According to this study, an inclusive work environment is defined as a supportive organisational setting that fosters engagement, nurtures individual growth, and affirms employees' identities through components such as an engaging environment, a nurturing environment, and an affirming environment.

A study by Rambe (2024) examined the challenges of building an inclusive work environment using a literature review. The findings revealed that, while employee inclusion is important in business, many organisational policies remain largely out of step with the discourses of diversity and inclusivity. However, the study did not explore how an inclusive work environment influences the job competency of hospitality employees.

Besides, Goswami and Goswami's (2020) research on examining the connection between workplace inclusion and employee engagement found that employee engagement is a favourable determinant of the growth and prosperity of any establishment. A survey of 335 telecoms staff found that an exciting workplace promotes dedication and enthusiasm among personnel, leading to greater productivity and business growth. The study's limitation is that its findings apply only to India and the telecommunications field.

Moreover, Vakira et al. (2023) aimed at characterising the impact of inclusive leadership on employee engagement in the hospitality industry. A survey was conducted on 247 workers in the hospitality sector in Zimbabwe. Based on the descriptive analysis, inclusive leadership directly influences employee engagement. Although this study was conducted in a developing country such as Kenya, it focused solely on the impact of inclusive leadership on employee engagement, which is why the current study is more necessary.

### **2.1 Engaging Work Environment and Employee Job Competency**

Globally, many studies consistently show that engaged employees are much more satisfied and committed. In practice, research shows that engaged employees typically take pride in their work and are likely to be loyal. Local findings in Kenya are consistent. Supportive surroundings, growth opportunities, and acknowledgement increase engagement and, consequently, job competency (Komen, 2024). On the other hand, a study conducted in a restaurant in Nairobi found that disengaged employees were significantly more likely to resign due to unhappiness and perceived lack of support.

Boedihewanto et al. (2024) used a structural equation modelling to investigate the impact of work environment and competency on employee performance in the hotel industry. According to the study, job happiness and performance are highly influenced by both competency and work environment. However, the study overlooks important aspects of employee engagement, including participation, recognition, and psychological involvement.

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Furthermore, knowledge of how organisational contexts support skill development is limited since competency is viewed as an individual trait rather than a construct shaped by interactions at work. Furthermore, the study's cross-sectional quantitative design and Indonesian environment limit its relevance to the Kenyan hotel industry. Thus, further context-specific research is still required to examine how an engaging workplace affects job competency among hospitality workers in Nairobi City County.

Recent African studies highlight the importance of empowering organisational practices in improving employee outcomes in the hospitality sector. For example, in South Africa, Cwibi and Mxunyelwa (2024) demonstrated that supportive and motivating work environments improve employee effectiveness, while Saojoao et al. (2025) established that employees who feel valued and supported exhibit higher service performance. Similarly, studies such as Ngoepe and Wakelin-Theron (2023) and competency framework research in Ghana emphasise skill development as a key driver of employee capability, although they do not explicitly link these outcomes to an empowering organisational culture.

At the local level, in Kenya, Rotich et al. (2025) found that empowerment and skill development significantly influence job performance among hotel employees in Nairobi. However, despite this growing body of evidence, most studies focus on performance and engagement outcomes, with limited attention to job competency as a distinct construct. Therefore, there remains a significant research gap in understanding how empowering culture directly influences job competency among hospitality employees, particularly within Nairobi City County.

Several studies show that employee engagement affects job competency. However, some studies do not support the findings; for example, Eshete et al. (2025) found that an engaging work environment does not automatically affect employee performance. They argue that employees job competency can be strongly affected by their personality. The study was carried out in Ethiopia, and also not in the hospitality sector, hence the need for the current study.

Similarly, a study by Lan et al. (2025) involving frontline employees in China found that job competency can be affected by factors such as knowledge, skills, and role clarity, as well as engagement. These study findings show that the relationship between an engaging work environment and job competency of hospitality employees is not always direct or positive.

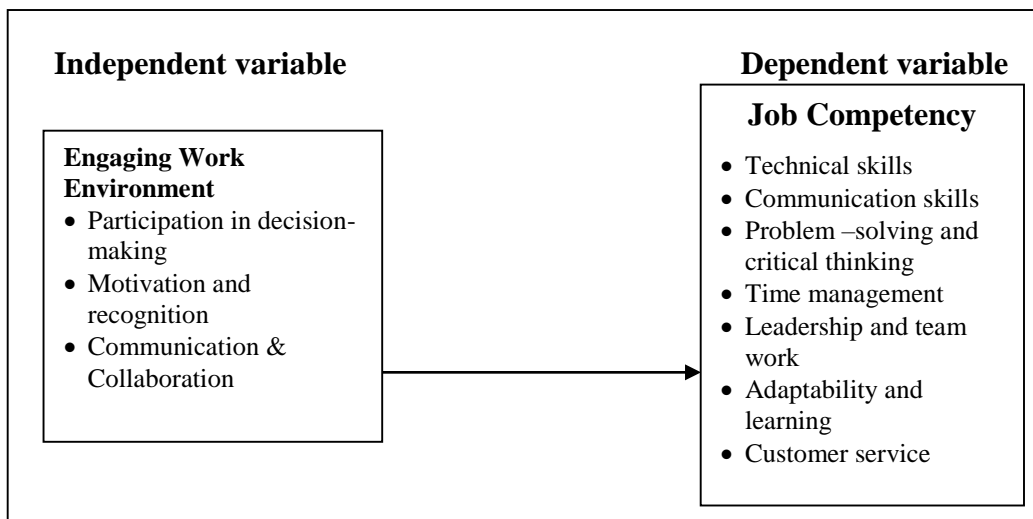
## 2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

The present research is premised on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Social Exchange Theory. Self-Determination Theory, developed by Deci and Ryan (2018), suggests that individuals are most motivated to act when they feel competent, connected, and autonomous. It implies that intrinsic motivation leads to improved performance. Within the hospitality sector, staff members empowered with growth opportunities, independence and purposeful input tend to be more autonomous, inventive and customer-service-oriented, thereby providing the organisation with better results (Jang et al., 2021). SDT, therefore, provides a framework for understanding how autonomy and psychological satisfaction may enhance work competence. The Social Exchange Theory, proposed by Blau (1964) and whose origins can be traced back to the writings of ancient philosophers, considers workplace relationships as exchanges in which one or both parties benefit, often hoping to receive benefits in return.

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The theory focuses on the balanced, mutually beneficial relationships within professional settings. Ahmed et al. (2023) note that, in the workplace, social interactions can be characterised by a cost-benefit analysis. When workers feel they are treated fairly and with dignity and respect, and that employers support them, they tend to show it through loyalty and higher performance. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2021) further emphasise that perceived fairness and recognition in the relationship between an organisation and an employee play a considerable role in motivation and employee productivity. This theory could be used to explain how strong relationships exist between employers and employees in the hospitality industry, which have the potential to increase overall job competency.

### 2.3 Conceptual framework



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

Source: Adapted from Saidi (2019)

### 3. Methodology

An embedded research design was employed in this study. This design is a mixed-methods approach and involves collecting two sets of data related to the study, with one serving as supporting data anchored in another type of data (Creswell & Clark, 2017). To address the study objectives, quantitative data were used. However, qualitative data were gathered to support the quantitative results. An inclusive work environment is the independent variable, which comprises of engaging work environment. The dependent variable is job competency. The region covers 696 km<sup>2</sup> and has 4.397 million inhabitants. All employees working in 113 Class A-rated hotels were targeted. According to findings from reconnaissance research conducted in Nairobi, about 9,245 employees were found to be working in Class A-rated hotels. The stratified random sampling technique was used to categorise hotels by star rating.

Consequently, a systematic sampling technique was used to select hospitality employees from the restaurant, kitchen, and housekeeping departments of Class A-rated hotels, using the list of employees provided by the human resources department. Purposive sampling was used to select human resource managers as key informants.

Slovin's formula was used to determine an adequate sample size for hotel employees. Based on the computations, the sample size for this study was 383 hotel employees. The sample size for the key informants was guided by data saturation. The study obtained primary data using structured self-administered questionnaires. The questionnaire consisted of sections that recorded respondents' demographic characteristics, inclusive work environment and the job competency of the respondents. The qualitative data was collected using semi-structured interview schedules to gather in-depth insights. One hotel from each star rating category was selected, and 36 employees (about 10% of the total sample) were selected as respondents for pretesting the research instruments. Through pretesting, some questions were reworded for clarity and to ensure that the main data collection was conducted with robust, sound instruments. Face validity was assessed through supervisors' judgments on whether the measurement items seemed meaningful and understandable to respondents and key informants. To ascertain content validity, questionnaire items were developed directly from the study objectives, literature review, and existing measurement scales. Supervisors and hotel human resource managers were also requested to evaluate whether the items adequately represented the study constructs. The Cronbach's alphas yielded was 0.782.

Two approaches, face-to-face and online distribution of the questionnaire, were adopted in this study to collect quantitative data. The selection of each approach was pegged on the HR managers' and respondents' preferences and convenience. With the help of three trained research assistants, initial visits to hotels were made for familiarisation and to obtain data-collection approvals from hotel management, especially HR managers, who were considered important for distributing questionnaires to hotel employees.

Once permission approvals were granted, the HR managers were requested to help distribute the questionnaires, whether online (using a link) or physical (using hard copies of the questionnaire). When a physical distribution was preferred, the questionnaires were distributed using a drop-and-pick-later approach due to the demanding hotel schedules. Selected employees were then requested to complete the questionnaires at their convenience and submit them, sealed, to the HR office for onward collection by the researchers. However, when online distribution was preferred, a Google Form® link was generated and sent to the respective HR managers, who were later asked to share the link with the respondents. Again, employees were requested to complete the questionnaires at their convenience. In both approaches, data collection was monitored every two weeks to ensure steady progress. Telephone and online reminders were also adopted to encourage the completion of the questionnaires. Data collection was conducted for two months, from March to April 2026.

Before data collection, necessary regulatory approvals from the Kenyatta University Graduate School, NACOSTI, and the hotel management were obtained. The research instruments were pretested, after which the researcher formally sought consent from hotel HR managers to allow data collection. Participants were informed of the study's purpose before agreeing to take part. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no risk was associated with a participant's withdrawal at any stage of this study. To protect privacy and anonymity, participants were not required to provide their names or other identifying details. Pseudocodes were used alongside interview quotes to ensure the confidentiality of interviewees. In addition, all data collected were treated with the highest level of confidentiality.

### 3.1 Key result and findings

383 questionnaires were distributed to respondents in Class-A-rated hotels, of which 298 were returned, yielding a response rate of 77.8%. At first, 15 interviews were successfully conducted. An initial assessment of the participants' responses indicated that no new information was gathered beyond the 14<sup>th</sup> interview. However, to examine whether data saturation had been reached, two additional interviews were conducted. These interviews did not generate new themes, ideas, or insights relevant to the study. Therefore, a total of 17 interviews were conducted and included in the thematic data analysis. The results indicated that male and female respondents accounted for 38.8% and 61.2% of the sample, respectively. These proportions indicated that female workers accounted for the largest share of the sample, reflecting strong female representation in hospitality roles such as front office, housekeeping, and service. The majority of the respondents were aged 25–34 years (54.8%), followed by those aged 35–44 years (24.2%). Respondents aged 18–24 years accounted for 12.9%. However, only 8.1% of the respondents were aged 45–54 years.

The results showed that the sample was dominated by employees working in the food and beverage department (54.8%), followed by those working in the kitchen and front desk departments, accounting for equal proportions (16.1%). Those working in the safety and security department accounted for 8.1%. The minority in the sample were employees attached to the housekeeping department (4.8%).

Generally, the results showed high agreement among respondents with the measurement items across all sub-components of job competency, with mean scores above 4.00. Regarding technical skills, all measurement items had mean scores above 4.00, reflecting a higher level of agreement among the respondents. Specifically, results revealed higher agreement among respondents regarding their confidence in using the tools and technologies required for various tasks ( $M = 4.16$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ).

**Table 1: Perceptions of Job Competency**

<i>Sub-construct and measurement items</i>	Mean	SD	Rank
<b><i>Technical Skills</i></b>	<b>4.10</b>	<b>0.65</b>	
I am confident in using the tools and technologies required for my job.	4.16	0.75	1 <sup>st</sup>
I can troubleshoot and resolve technical issues related to my role.	4.06	0.74	3 <sup>rd</sup>
I stay up to date on industry-specific tools and technologies.	4.05	0.84	4 <sup>th</sup>
I can adapt quickly to new technology software systems introduced in my workplace.	4.13	0.80	2 <sup>nd</sup>
<b><i>Communication Skills</i></b>	<b>4.20</b>	<b>0.58</b>	
I communicate clearly and concisely in both written and verbal forms.	4.32	0.62	1 <sup>st</sup>
I actively listen and understand others' perspectives.	4.24	0.59	2 <sup>nd</sup>
I can understandably present complex information.	4.08	0.66	4 <sup>th</sup>
I can communicate constructively in situations of conflict or disagreement.	4.16	0.79	3 <sup>rd</sup>
<b><i>Problem-solving and Critical Thinking</i></b>	<b>4.15</b>	<b>0.63</b>	
I can efficiently identify the root causes of problems.	3.95	0.84	3 <sup>rd</sup>
I use logical reasoning to evaluate alternatives and make decisions.	4.19	0.72	2 <sup>nd</sup>
I approach problems with a positive, solution-oriented mindset.	4.29	0.58	1 <sup>st</sup>
<b><i>Time Management and Organisation</i></b>	<b>4.23</b>	<b>0.54</b>	
I effectively prioritise tasks based on urgency and importance.	4.24	0.74	1 <sup>st</sup>
I maintain a structured approach to organising my daily, weekly or monthly tasks.	4.24	0.59	1 <sup>st</sup>
I meet deadlines consistently and manage my workload efficiently.	4.19	0.60	2 <sup>nd</sup>
<b><i>Customer Service</i></b>	<b>4.28</b>	<b>0.54</b>	
I respond to client needs in a timely and professional manner.	4.29	0.71	1 <sup>st</sup>
I handle client complaints or issues calmly and with a focus on resolution.	4.26	0.79	2 <sup>nd</sup>
I manage client needs in a timely and professional manner.	4.29	0.61	1 <sup>st</sup>
<b><i>Adaptability and Training</i></b>	<b>4.40</b>	<b>0.51</b>	
I am open to learning new skills and acquiring relevant information for my role.	4.42	0.53	1 <sup>st</sup>
I am flexible and adaptable, able to adjust to changes in my work environment and responsibilities.	4.37	0.55	2 <sup>nd</sup>
<b><i>Leadership and Teamwork</i></b>	<b>4.27</b>	<b>0.66</b>	
I take the initiative to lead tasks or teams when required.	4.32	0.74	1 <sup>st</sup>
I work effectively with others, recognising and leveraging team members' strengths.	4.23	0.69	2 <sup>nd</sup>

*Notes:* N = 286. SD = Standard Deviation. Interpretation range: *Strongly Disagree* (1.00 – 1.80), *Disagree* (1.81 – 2.60), *Neutral* (2.61 – 3.40), *Agree* (3.41 – 4.20), *Strongly Agree* (4.21 – 5.00)

The lowest-rated item was 'I stay updated on industry-specific tools and technologies' with a mean score of 4.05 (SD = 0.84). However, the results still reflected a higher level of agreement among the respondents. The values below 1.00 standard deviations across all four items reflected minimal variation in respondents' responses. These results indicated that the respondents perceived themselves as competent in technical skills.

The mean scores for the communication skills aspect of job competency range from 4.08 to 4.32, indicating generally high agreement among respondents. The highest-rated item was "I communicate clearly and concisely in both written and verbal forms" (M = 4.32, SD = 0.62), suggesting strong agreement among respondents and implying that hotel employees can interact effectively with guests, supervisors, and colleagues, which is crucial for in-service delivery. However, the lowest-rated item was "I can understandably present complex information" (M = 4.08, SD = 0.66), indicating lower agreement and suggesting that some employees struggled to explain detailed or technical information clearly. The standard deviation values ranged from 0.59 to 0.79, demonstrating low variability and relative consistency in responses. Overall, this sub-construct recorded a mean score of 4.20 (SD = 0.58), indicating a high level of competence in communication skills among the respondents. This finding suggested that communication skills were highly developed among employees in Class A-rated hotels and may contribute positively to job competency, teamwork, customer satisfaction, and service quality in the hotel sector.

Concerning problem-solving and critical thinking, the mean scores ranged from 3.95 to 4.29 across the three measurement items. These scores demonstrated a general agreement among the respondents. "I approach problems with a positive, solution-oriented mindset" was the highest-rated item, with a mean score of 4.29 (SD = 0.58), suggesting strong agreement among respondents and indicating that hotel employees have a positive mindset when handling problems, which is crucial for addressing guest demands. Nevertheless, "I can identify the root causes of problems efficiently" was the lowest-rated item, with a mean score of 3.95 (SD = 0.84), suggesting lower agreement. Even though this finding showed general agreement among the majority of respondents, it implied that some hotel employees were struggling to efficiently identify the root causes of problems, which can negatively affect their overall job competency and service delivery. Overall, the sub-construct mean was 4.15 (SD = 0.63), indicating a high level of competence in problem-solving and critical thinking among hotel employees.

Regarding the descriptive results for the time management and organisation sub-dimension of job competency, all mean scores ranged from 4.19 to 4.24, indicating strong agreement among the respondents. The highest-rated items were "I effectively prioritise tasks based on urgency and importance" and "I maintain a structured approach to organising my daily, weekly or monthly tasks", with equal mean scores of 4.24, but different standard deviation values of 0.74 and 0.59, respectively. The mean scores suggested strong agreement among the respondents, implying that hotel employees are competent at prioritising tasks by urgency and importance and at maintaining a structured approach to organising assigned tasks. However, results further revealed a relatively lower rating on "I meet deadlines consistently and manage my workload efficiently" (M = 4.19, SD = 0.60), suggesting lower agreement among respondents and indicating challenges among some hotel employees in meeting deadlines and managing workloads. Overall, this sub-dimension had a mean of 4.23 (SD = 0.54), suggesting

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strong agreement among the respondents and implying that hotel employees are competent in time management and task organisation.

Regarding the customer service aspect of job competency, mean scores ranged from 4.26 to 4.29, indicating very strong agreement among the respondents. Two items, “I respond to client needs in a timely and professional manner” and “I manage client needs in a timely and professional manner,” had equal mean scores of 4.29, with different standard deviations of 0.71 and 0.61, respectively. These results suggested strong agreement among the respondents and implied that hotel employees were competent at responding to and managing client needs in a timely and professional manner. However, “I handle complaints or issues calmly and with a focus on resolution” was the lowest-rated item, with a mean score of 4.26 (SD = 0.79), suggesting lower agreement among respondents and suggesting some struggle in dealing calmly with guest issues. The overall mean score for the customer service aspect of job competency was 4.28 (SD = 0.54), suggesting strong agreement and indicating that hotel employees are competent in delivering excellent customer service.

Regarding adaptability and training, the mean scores ranged from 4.37 to 4.42, indicating the strongest agreement among the respondents. Generally, this aspect had the highest overall mean score of 4.40 (SD = 0.51) among all the aspects of the job competency construct, depicting hotel employees’ openness to learning new skills and information (M = 4.42, SD = 0.53) and their flexibility and ability to adapt to changes in the workplace (M = 4.37, SD = 0.55).

Results for the leadership and teamwork aspect of job competency revealed mean scores ranging from 4.23 to 4.32, indicating strong agreement among the respondents. The highest-rated item was “I take the initiative to lead tasks or teams when required” (M = 4.32, SD = 0.74), suggesting strong agreement among respondents and indicating hotel employees’ competence in taking the initiative to lead when the occasion arises. Additionally, the lowest-rated item was “I work effectively with others, recognising and leveraging the strengths of team members” (M = 4.23, SD = 0.69), indicating lower agreement and suggesting challenges among some respondents in working effectively with others. The overall mean score of 4.27 (SD = 0.66) indicated strong agreement among the respondents.

### 3.2 Testing of Hypothesis One ( $H_{01}$ )

To evaluate the influence of an engaging work environment on job competency among hotel employees, a multiple linear regression analysis was utilised to examine the influence of each of the three dimensions of the engaging work environment. The regression model summary in Table 4.3 revealed that the model explained approximately 41.2% of the variation in job competency.

**Table 2: Model Summary Results for Objective One**

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.642	0.412	0.406	0.431

Analysis further revealed that the regression model was statistically significant (F [3, 282] = 75.42,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that the three dimensions of an engaging work

environment had a joint and statistically significant effect on job competency (Table 4.4).

**Table 3: ANOVA Results for Objective One**

Model	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	42.10	3	14.03	75.42	.000
	Residual	52.48	282	0.186		
	Total	94.58	285			

Even though the three dimensions of an engaging work environment were found to have positive, statistically significant effects on job competency, the results presented in Table 4.5 revealed that only the effect of motivation and recognition was significant ( $\beta = 0.386$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This finding showed that employees who felt recognised and motivated were more likely to demonstrate higher levels of job competency.

**Table 4.: Regression Coefficient Results for Objective One**

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.112	0.213	—	5.22	.000
Participation in Decision-Making	0.094	0.054	0.087	1.74	.083
Motivation and Recognition	0.386	0.061	0.412	6.33	.000
Communication and Collaboration	0.081	0.055	0.076	1.47	.142

However, the effect of participation in the decision-making aspect on job competency was positive ( $\beta = 0.054$ ) but not statistically significant ( $p = 0.083$ ). Similarly, the effect of communication and collaboration was positive but not statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.055$ ,  $p = 0.142$ ). These findings demonstrated that the two dimensions did not have independent effects on job competency when considered together with motivation and recognition. Therefore, enhancing job competency appeared to rely more on motivation and recognition than on participation in decision-making and communication. The study's findings partly supported Lan et al.'s (2025) assertion that employee competency may also depend on factors such as knowledge, skills, and role clarity, rather than engagement alone. Likewise, the findings corroborated the Boediherwanto et al. (2024) study, which observed that the work environment and competency influence performance, although the study did not focus more on participation and recognition dimensions.

Based on these results,  $H_{01}$  was rejected, indicating that an engaging work environment did not have a statistically significant effect on job competency.

### **3.3 Thematic Findings of Objective One and Integration with Quantitative Results**

#### **a) Theme 1: Employee Involvement**

Results under this theme demonstrated that employees' confidence, motivation, and work performance were improved when they were involved in decision-making regarding hotel operations. Most interviewees indicated that employees who participated in discussions concerning hotel operations and service delivery

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demonstrated more commitment to their duties. For example, one participant supported this insight, noting that:

*“When managers/supervisors involve employees in discussions about hotel operations, they feel valued and eventually become more committed to their roles.”* (HRM4)

Another participant reported that:

*“Employees perform better when managers listen to their suggestions. They are fully immersed in delivering the tasks exceptionally because they feel they own them.”* (HRM9)

However, the situation was not uniform across all participants, as others reported divergent views on employee involvement. One participant, for example, noted that:

*“We are busy most of the time and must address demanding customer expectations. Even though involving employees in decision-making is important, it is sometimes difficult to include all employees as management decisions must be made quickly.”* (HRM12)

These insights helped explain the quantitative results, which found that participation in decision-making had a positive but statistically non-significant effect on job competency.

#### **b) Theme 2: Employee Recognition**

Most participants perceived staff recognition and rewarding as crucial factors in promoting employee dedication and competency. Results showed that employees became more motivated when management recognised their efforts. On this note, one participant remarked:

*“We have noted that when supervisors in various departments recognise employees’ commendable efforts in service delivery, employees feel motivated to work harder and outstandingly.”* (HRM2)

Another interviewee echoed the same insights, stating that:

*“Recognition is a catalyst for good employees’ performance.”* (HRM6)

Beyond recognition, other participants underscored the importance of rewarding employees to improve overall hotel performance. As a typical example, one participant noted that:

*“Rewarding employees for doing a good job has been our most successful strategy in promoting their performance and competency. Employees feel motivated and valued regardless of the size of rewards.”* (HRM6)

Collectively, the results of this theme supported the inferential results, specifically the multiple linear regression results. In the regression model, all three aspects of an engaging work environment were found to have a positive independent influence on job competency. However, the effect of the motivation and recognition aspect was statistically significant, underscoring its importance in promoting employees’ job competency.

### c) Theme 3: Workplace Communication

Analysis of HR managers' insights showed that communication and teamwork were important aspects of an engaging work environment, as they helped improve coordination and service quality. From this perspective, one interviewee reported that:

*“Teamwork is important in the delivery of tasks, and we depend more on this because all departments must work closely to delivery outstanding services to guests.”* (HRM7)

A similar understanding was reflected in the response of another participant who stated that:

*“When communication is open, employees understand their tasks clearly and so can delivery excellently.”* (HRM11)

While many interviewees underscored the importance of communication and collaboration, some participants reported breakdowns in communication. For example, one participant indicated that:

*“When the hotel is full of clients, when we are operating at our maximum capacity, you will realise instances when some departments fail to collaborate with others properly.”* (HRM13)

Even though interviewees' responses regarding communication and collaboration were largely positive, the thematic findings supported the quantitative results. Communication breakdowns during peak periods suggested that communication and collaboration positively affect job competency, but the effect was not significant.

### 3.4 Summary of findings

Descriptive results revealed respondents' agreement regarding participation in decision-making, motivation and recognition, and communication and collaboration, as all mean scores were above 4.00. The regression results showed that the motivation and recognition aspect of an engaging work environment had a statistically significant effect on job competency. The effects of participation in decision-making, communication, and collaboration were positive but not statistically significant. Qualitative analysis of the data generated three themes: employment involvement, employee recognition, and workplace communication. These themes aligned well with the quantitative findings and also helped explain the insignificant results.

### 3.5 Conclusion

The study concluded that an engaging work environment directly influenced job competency among hotel employees in Class A-rated hotels. Motivation and recognition practices significantly improved job competency by enhancing morale and commitment. Additionally, participation in decision-making, communication, and collaboration play a supportive, weaker role in enhancing job competency.

3.6 Recommendations (for practice/ policy/ Areas for further research).

#### a) Policy recommendations

Regarding policies, the study proposed several recommendations. To begin with, policymakers in the hospitality industry and regulatory bodies should enhance and reshape their inclusive work policies to promote fairness, equal opportunity, workforce diversity, and employee inclusion within hotels. Hotels should rely on such policies to

guide employee recruitment and selection, ensure equal access to training opportunities, and address cases of discrimination and harassment.

Another policy area is strengthening employee development policies, as professional development has been found to significantly enhance job competency. Therefore, industry stakeholders and policymakers need to establish policies that promote continuous employee training and professional development.

### **b) Recommendations for Practice**

The study recommends that hotel management prioritise engaging work environment to enhance job competency among employees.

### **c) Areas for further research**

This study focused only on Class A-rated hotels to examine the influence of an inclusive work environment on job competency. Therefore, future studies should examine this relationship in other hospitality establishments, such as restaurants and lodges, to improve the generalisability of the findings.

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