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Original Article

### Business Ethical Assurance and Organizational Culture: A Study of Selected Star-Rated Hotels in Kisumu City, Kenya

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Culture.*

Hospitality organizations today have written codes of ethics with statements such as integrity, equality, fairness, customer focus and commitment to excellence. However, hospitality organizations face difficulties in spite of a written code of ethics in stemming unethical issues such as fraud, unfair treatment, discrimination, misleading information and environmental harm through mainstreaming business ethics in organizational culture. This is evident as a result of little that has been done to ensure the written codes of ethics are embedded into the day-to-day operations. The main purpose of this study was to find out the effects of business ethical assurance on organizational culture. The specific objectives were to find out the extent to which, business ethical assurance affects the organizational culture of hotels in Kisumu City, Kenya. The study employed a descriptive survey design and an explanatory research design. The target population was 150 employees, out of which 135 formed the sample size from five hotels rated between three to five stars in Kisumu City. The study employed purposive sampling which was used to select five hotels. Simple random sampling was used to select the respondents. Instruments for collecting data included self-administered questionnaires and interview schedules. Questionnaires were distributed to employees in the selected hotels and interviews were conducted among 15 departmental managers of the five selected hotels. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha at the level of 0.7. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The study yielded an R-value of 0.935 and an R Square value of 0.874. The findings of this study indicated that business ethical assurance ( $t= 4.197$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) affects organizational culture. The study concluded that assuring business ethics affects organizational culture. The study therefore recommends that hospitality organizations increase measures that enable an ethical workplace to minimize unethical issues that arise at the workplace.

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## INTRODUCTION

Business ethics is the behaviour that a business adheres to in its daily dealings with the world (Borgerson, 2008). The ethics of a particular business can be diverse (Solomon, 1983). They apply not only to how the business interacts with the world at large, but also to their one-on-one dealings with a single customer (Solomon, 1991). Many hotel operators have gained a bad reputation just by being in business. To some people, businesses are interested in making money, and that is the bottom line (Solomon, 1983). It could be called capitalism in its purest form (Antoniou, 2008). Making money is not wrong in itself rather it is how some businesses conduct themselves that brings up the question of ethical behaviour (Maitland, 1994).

According to Fennel and Malloy (2008), there is a growing concern for business ethics in the hospitality industry as hospitality professionals are faced with ethical dilemmas in their daily operations. Complex and interesting ethical issues affect this broad industry whose business ranges from restaurant operations to tourism-based businesses. By its nature, the hospitality industry places customers and employees in tempting situations as well as attracting abuse. Opportunities to indulge in unethical behaviour arise on several occasions mainly because of the widespread cash transactions and the sector's vulnerability to dishonesty. Some of the ethical challenges faced by hospitality managers today aren't new and have been taking place for a long time (Fennel & Malloy, 2008).

## Problem Statement:

Due to intense competition and a significant decline in hospitality businesses, there has been a rise in campaigns for eco-tourism and an increasing need for social responsibility, hence making embedding business ethics in hospitality organization cultures a vital consideration for competitive advantage in the industry. Some of the ethical deviances in the hospitality industry include: overbooking, theft, mistreatment of others, ethnic prejudices, benefit at the expense of guest supplementary service, and misleading information in the restaurant menus, hotel brochures and websites. According to Babin; (2000), companies with high levels of ethical values and social responsibility tend to be more profitable than other companies. Even though organizations spend millions of shillings to build a positive public image, that money will be wasted when the organization doesn't effectively ensure business ethics in the long run. This clearly shows that hospitality organizations can benefit from conducting their business ethically and more responsibly. This research, therefore, sought to find out the effects of business ethical assurance on organizational culture in the hospitality industry in Kenya.

## Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to investigate the effects of business ethical assurance on organizational culture in the hotel industry. The study sought to find out the extent to which effectively embedding business ethics in organizations can build strong and efficient organizational cultures.

**Research Objectives:**

- To establish the extent to which business ethical assurance affects organizational culture.

**Research Hypothesis**

**H0<sub>1</sub>** There is no significant effect of business ethical assurance on organizational culture.

**LITERATURE REVIEW****Business Ethical Assurance**

Hospitality institutions have certain special features. They deliver accommodation services, catering services, and additional services many of which are intangible (Djellal, et al., 2003). Intangibility means that these services can neither be transported nor stored, but are designed for direct consumption. Hotels are also bound to their location, service production, and consumption; therefore take place in a specific space and time. This means that a hotel's range of products and services is limited in terms of capacity and resources (Teare, et al., 1994). Given these characteristics, ethical practices in hotels need to be organized in specific ways to realize the value of the implementation of ethics in all hospitality operations. (Stevens and Fleckenstein, 1999) Proposed that due to the inherent industry characteristics of inseparability and intangibility, hospitality industry management must attend to ethical issues more carefully than other industries.

It is important to note that a code of ethical conduct, on paper or in electronic form, is merely that; any organization can have a very good code of ethics yet a bad culture (Moore, 2005). Every hospitality organization that is aiming for long-term success should live up to the code, most of the time the challenge lies in how to properly embed the code of ethics within the organization, to imbue an appropriate culture to the extent that it is instilled in the hearts and minds of staff at all levels, subcontractors and even suppliers of the hospitality organization.

An organization's norms, values and expectations should be communicated in concrete terms that all employees can understand and that relate directly

to their daily work activities. If employees cannot see how the firm's values safeguard its mission and enhance their contribution to that mission, they will view ethical structures as a bothersome add-on, rather than as part of every workday. Effective workplace cultures should ensure compliance by making values and ethical expectations crystal clear repeating the norms, values and expectations in a multitude of ways across a wide array of communications. Hospitality firms should also use the other elements of ethical culture to raise employees' ethical commitment far above the bare minimum required by law and social convention (Talbot, 2006).

According to a study by Chan; (2011), ethical practices may not be easy to maintain. However, a well-designed ethics policy, ethical leadership, and implementation of ethics into organizational strategies and processes will make it easier. The reason is that these factors are incorporated into the organizational culture. How might a culture of character be developed? It is certainly by intention. It is the responsibility of particular individuals within the organization, i.e., its leadership (Moore, 2005). Strong leaders model and pass on ethical aspects of the culture and use techniques like structure, decision-making processes, rewards, norms, heroes, stories, rituals and other artefacts to create a strong culture. This is the foundation for creating a culture of character, where members of the organization know what is right, value what is right, and do what is right.

Joseph and Edna (2006) further state that it is not enough to communicate corporate values, ethics training should be a top priority in organizations to help employees understand the ethical goals and values of the organization, increase their ability to deal with ethical issues (Proenca, 2004), and encourage ethical behaviour (Baggett, 2007). In-depth training on company expectations and how the values translate into day-to-day behaviour is critical.

Integrity is a word found in many organizations' value statements, yet once you interact with this

organization, you realize very uncouth ways of operation. For organizations to be effective, they need to be culturally wise. They must learn to realize that superficial understanding can have a tremendous negative impact on people and the business itself. Differences in values mean differences not only in how but why people behave the way they do. Training by a skilled professional in addressing the underlying attributes of world cultures is essential today. An ethics programme on the other hand is a set of activities, policies, and procedures intended to support employees to understand and comply with the ethical standards and policies set by the organization. Programmes comprise various elements designed to prevent misconduct, defined as behaviour that violates the law or organizational ethics standards (ERC, 2008). Companies with strong ethics programmes report improvements in ethical conduct, and programmes have a positive effect on employee behaviour, ethical attitudes and corporate culture (Ferrell, et al., 1998). Each element is likely to have some impact on employees' attitudes and behaviour, but the manner and extent of this impact may vary.

### **Organizational Culture and Ethics**

Organizational culture refers to an organization's beliefs, attitudes, values, ideologies, practices, customs, and language. It is important that managers and employees be committed and loyal to organizational beliefs and values for a culture to be shaped. Organizations differ in size, structure, purpose and culture. An organization's culture or personality is only partly comprised of the personalities of its people. Often, a distinction exists between the qualities of the people themselves and the way the organization expects them to be. An organization's culture is what makes it distinctive; it makes an organization feel and act like itself (Cartwright and Cooper, 1993).

The ethical climate is the organization's culture or conscience. Codes of conduct, ethics policies, top management's actions on ethical issues, values and moral development, the philosophies of coworkers, and the opportunity for misconduct all

contribute to an organization's ethical climate. Organizations can manage their culture and ethical climate by trying to hire employees whose values match their own. Some firms even measure potential employees' values during the hiring process and strive to choose individuals who fit within the ethical climate rather than those whose beliefs and values differ significantly. A poor fit can have very expensive ramifications for both organizations and employees. Beyond the potential for misconduct, a poor organizational ethical climate usually results in low job satisfaction, decreased performance, and higher turnover (Sims and Kroeck, 1994).

The entire basis of promoting business ethics in organizations rests on the notion that ethical cultures produce benefits that result in a competitive advantage. One perspective of organizations is that their essential purpose is to predict and control the behaviour of their members. Mostly, organizations do this by trying to make their employees accountable. Accountability operationalizes an ethical culture hence a climate of trust is enabled, accountability promotes compliance with rules and regulations toward organizational ethics. Furthermore, ethics can be defined in terms of shared expectations, accountabilities, and when standards become more clearly defined. People have a better understanding of what is expected of them, and the mechanisms that transmit and support the culture are less encumbered by ambiguity, uncertainty, and dysfunctional malleability (Buckley, et al., 2001).

Strong ethical cultures realize greater valuation in the stock market and investment community. Strong ethical cultures send a signal that the firm is well managed, invests in human assets and appears to be doing all the right things, and this increased reputation influences increased investment which raises the stock price (Belkaoui and Pavlik, 1992; Fombrun, 1996; Harrell-Cook and Ferris, 1997). (Koys, 1997) further tells in his research that firms that emphasise fairness objectives in the treatment of employees, through progressive human resources practices, received higher scores on a corporate reputation index.



(Fombrun, 1996) argued that better-regarded companies build their reputations by developing practices that integrate economic and social considerations into their competitive strategies. They initiate policies that reflect their core values; that consider the joint welfare of investors, customers, and employees; he suggests that a company's reputation derives from its management practices, which make the firm a good place to work.

The hotel industry, which is one of the world's greatest industries, is also a social phenomenon with a great tendency to expand and develop gradually every year. The ethical components of the tourism and hotel industry are important due to the industry's great international importance. Even if the main goal of the hoteliers is to maximize their profits, ethical principles and standards should be respected first. Hospitable acts, expressions of kindness, and treating others as we would like to be treated are the most effective activities in service marketing. Business ethics increases the reputation, market competitiveness and market share of a hotel more than other marketing activities.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Study Area

This research sought an investigation into the effect of business ethical assurance on organizational culture. The study was undertaken in Kisumu City, Kenya. Kisumu City is located in western Kenya. Kisumu City has a full range of educational, industrial, agricultural, medical, and social facilities. The City is multi-ethnic, with the Luo tribe predominating. Although Dholuo is the local language mostly used there, Swahili is spoken, and English is also widely understood. Kisumu City is a commercial centre of a farm region, where mainly sugar, frozen fish, textiles, and processed sisal are marketed. In recent years, the City started to develop a tourism industry with the attractions of Lake Victoria and nearby tourist attractions and wildlife, such as Kisumu Museum, Impala Park, Hippo-Point and access to nearby islands. The City's renowned beaches, such as Lwang'ni Beach, Tilapia Beach, and Dunga

Beach, are not only famously known for fish mongering but also for sightseeing, lake viewing, and indulgence in water-related activities. The City offers good infrastructure, making both hotels and tourist attraction sites easily accessible; therefore, as a result, there is a rise in hospitality operators in Kisumu City (Opiyo, 2017).

### Research Design

Research design is the arrangement of conditions for the collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy as a procedure (Kothari, 2008). The study employed both descriptive and explanatory research designs. The descriptive research design was used because, according to (Saunders, 2002), this design enables one to capture all pertinent aspects of a situation while employing a unit study under investigation. Explanatory research design, on the other hand, was used to allow an in-depth acquisition of knowledge and insight into the study population and the variables under study. The researcher systematically collected data, presented it and analyzed it before making conclusions and recommendations. The research designs allowed the researcher to compare the business ethical assurance dimensions and their effect on organizational culture.

### Sample Size

Samples were drawn from the target population of five, five-star to three-star rated hotels with an employee total of 150. The sample size was statistically obtained from the total population by adjusting it to round-off decimals to one person. Mugenda and Mugenda's (1999) formula was used to arrive at the sample size.

$n$

$$Nf = \frac{n}{1 + n / N}$$

Where:  $Nf$  = the desired sample size (when the population is less than 10,000).

$n$  = the desired sample size (when the population is more than 10,000).

$N$  = the estimate of the population size.

Therefore, if the desired sample size is 384 when the population is more than 10,000, with a precision of 5% and a confidence level of 95% (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999), the sample size of this study was attained as follows

$$Nf = \text{less than } 10,000 = 384$$

$$1 + 384/150 = 135$$

### Data Collection Instruments

Data was collected by the use of questionnaires and interview schedules. Questionnaires are a collection of items to which a respondent is expected to react, usually in writing (Kothari, 2008). Questionnaires consisting of both closed-ended and open-ended questions were administered to the hotel employees. Interview schedules refer to person-to-person verbal communication in which one person asks the other questions to elicit information or opinions (Kothari, 2004). Interview schedules were given to hotel managers.

### Primary Data

Primary data refers to information a researcher obtains from the field, that is, from the subjects in the sample collected. Primary data was collected by the researcher through interview schedules and questionnaires. Interview schedules were used to interview key informants. Secondary data was sourced through document analysis, journals, books, and previous studies.

### Ethical Considerations

In this research, the researcher considered confidentiality, privacy and informed consent of the respondents. Confidentiality is the right to maintain autonomy on data collected while privacy refers to the control of who accesses personal information. Only relevant details that helped in answering the research questions were included. The researcher owes loyalty to the informants and honours promises associated with the research.

Ethical issues require informed consent by all participants agreeing to the research before it commences and are informed what the research is about and their role in the research. The respondents in this research were informed adequately about the procedures to be followed in the research, the expected duration of participation, the context of privacy/confidentiality and the purpose of the research. From this, the respondents made their decision to participate in the study based on adequate knowledge of the study.

## DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, AND INTERPRETATION

### Business Ethical Assurance

The respondents' views were collected based on how they viewed ethical assurance in the organizations, (31.7%) agreed that their organizations conducted regular training on ethics, (25%) were neutral, (21.7 %) disagreed, (15%) strongly agreed, and (6.7%) strongly disagreed.

With regard to ethics training that reflects on real-life conditions of the ethical issues that employees face, (50%) strongly agreed and agreed, (21.7%) neutral, and (3.3%) strongly disagreed. Again (51.7%) both strongly agreed and agreed that the organization's training includes clear criteria for the skills employees are expected to possess, (18.3%) neutral, (23.3%) disagreed, and (6.7%) strongly disagreed. Also, (50%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that top management coaches ethics in the organization through practising fairness in all hotel operations, (18.3%) were neutral, (26.7%) disagreed, and (5%) strongly disagreed.

With regard to the organization having set programs that influence ethical conduct, (58.3%) strongly agreed and agreed, (16.7%) neutral, (16.7%) disagreed, and (8.3%) strongly disagreed. Concerning whether top management cares about business ethics based on how they manage the hotel operations, (60%) strongly agreed and agreed, (16.7%) were neutral, (18.3%) disagreed, and (5%) strongly disagreed. However, (58.3%)

of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that ethical behaviour is rewarded in their organization, (18.3%) were neutral, (13.3%) disagreed, while (10%) strongly disagreed.

With regard to whether the organization has procedures for penalizing unethical behaviour, 60%) strongly agreed and disagreed, (16.7%) neutral, (16.7%) disagreed, while (6.7%) strongly disagreed. In addition (56.6%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that the organization communicates the importance of ethics, (16.7%) neutral, (16.7%) disagreed and (10%) strongly disagreed. On whether the organization set service standards that reflect quality services of their clients' experience, (66.6%) strongly agreed and agreed, (16.7%) disagreed, (10%) neutral, while (6.7%) strongly disagreed.

### Reliability Tests

Cronbach's alpha was used to test the reliability of the data collected. The highest value stood at 0.983 while the lowest value stood at 0.904. These results showed that the indicators used to measure the variables were reliable in explaining each of the variables under study because they were all above the 0.7 threshold. Business ethical assurance, denoted as X2, with ten indicators, had a Cronbach Alpha of 0.969. while the dependent variable, organizational culture (Y), with seven indicators, had a Cronbach Alpha of 0.962.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Effect of Business Ethical Assurance on Organizational Culture

Business ethical assurance factors were analyzed by regression analysis, t value of 4.197 at a p value of 0.00, which meant that there was a positive relationship between business ethical assurance and organizational culture. The researcher thus was able to arrive at the understanding that there is a significant effect between business ethical assurance and organizational culture, which led to the rejection of the null hypothesis that stated: *there is no significant effect of business ethical assurance on organizational culture.*

This study found out that ethics training is very essential and it helps the employees know clearly the competencies they are expected to possess and develop. Joseph and Edna (2006) advocate that it is not enough to communicate corporate values; ethics training should be a top priority in organizations in order to help employees understand the ethical goals and values of the organization. (Baggett, 2007) posits that ethics training increases employees' ability to deal with ethical issues and encourages ethical behaviour.

The top management coaches ethical behaviour in the organization, as the majority of the respondents agreed that departmental managers practised fairness in all the hotel operations. This is in agreement with (Chan, 2011), who states that good ethical practices may not be easy to maintain; however, ethical leadership and implementation of ethics into organizational strategies and processes will make it easier. This is further supported by the responses, 58% agreed that ethical behaviour is rewarded in the organization and 60% also agreed that the organization penalizes unethical behaviour. Rewarding and penalizing ethical behaviour makes hotel employees become conscious of the work environment; hence, a work ethic is maintained.

According to Olson (2013), the values an organization demonstrates in its goals, policies, and practices are the heart of any workplace culture, and the quality of experience in an organization depends on the quality of its culture. The respondents agreed that the organization demonstrates the importance of ethics through training and setting service standards, which is reflected in the quality of services their customers experience. This, in turn, enlivens and enriches both the employees' and customers' experience, hence a positive culture. These study findings are in agreement with (Buckley, et al., 2001) who posits that the entire basis of promoting business ethics in organizations rests on the notion that ethical cultures produce benefits that result in a competitive advantage.

## CONCLUSION

This study established a significant positive relationship between business ethical assurance and organizational culture, as evidenced by the regression analysis results ( $t = 4.197$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ). The findings led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, confirming that ethical assurance practices such as ethics training, communication of values, and leadership commitment play a vital role in shaping and sustaining a strong organizational culture. These practices help employees understand the expectations placed upon them and align their behaviour with the organization's ethical standards.

Furthermore, the study revealed that top management plays a critical role in modelling ethical behaviour and fostering a culture of fairness and accountability. A majority of respondents acknowledged that managers practice fairness and that ethical behaviour is both rewarded and unethical behaviour penalized within their organizations. These mechanisms create an environment where employees become more conscious of their actions, which in turn strengthens work ethics and builds trust across teams.

Finally, the findings support the idea that ethical culture is central to an organization's overall performance and employee satisfaction. Through consistent ethics training and the establishment of clear service standards, organizations enhance both employee engagement and customer experience. A strong ethical culture not only promotes integrity but also contributes to the organization's competitive advantage, confirming that embedding ethics into the core of a hotel business operations is both a strategic and moral imperative.

## RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends that hospitality organizations, institutionalize business ethical assurance by integrating ethics into all levels of management and operations. This includes developing inclusive ethics training programs that go beyond

policy awareness to actively build employees' capacity to recognize, analyze, and address ethical dilemmas. Regular training should be mandatory and tailored to different departmental roles to ensure relevance and effectiveness.

Also, top leadership should take an active role in modelling ethical behaviour, setting clear expectations, and consistently rewarding or penalizing behaviour to reinforce organizational values. Leaders must be equipped not only to enforce ethical standards but also to communicate the importance of ethics as a core component of the organization's identity and long-term strategy.

Finally, it is recommended that future research explore the long-term impact of ethical assurance practices on employee retention, customer satisfaction, and business performance. This would provide deeper insights into how ethical culture contributes to organizational sustainability and competitiveness in an evolving global business environment.

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