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The Impact of Covid-19 on The Skills Matrix in the Hospitality Industry: A Study of Selected Lodges and Hotels in Lusaka District

Nalukui Daka^{1*}, Dr. Norman Kachamba¹

¹Graduate School of Business, University of Zambia, Zambia

*Corresponding author

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Abstract

This study explores the profound impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the skills matrix within the hospitality industry in Lusaka, Zambia. Through a mixed-methods approach involving 49 establishments, the research highlights significant job losses and skills mismatches resulting from the pandemic. It also examines the adaptive strategies employed by the industry to mitigate these effects. The findings advocate for the implementation of continuous skills development programs and strategic workforce planning to enhance industry resilience and sustainability. Recommendations are made for the development of crisis management plans that incorporate skills development, aimed at better preparing the industry for future global crises.

Keywords: Skills matrix, Covid-19, Hospitality Industry, Skills

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1. Introduction

The hospitality industry globally serves as a dynamic source of employment, significantly contributing to job creation. In 2019, this sector was responsible for approximately 334 million jobs, representing 10.6% of the global job market, and it accounted for one out of every four new jobs worldwide between 2014 and 2019. However, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 marked a dramatic shift, leading to a substantial reduction in available jobs. The industry suffered a staggering loss of 62 million jobs globally, with Africa being disproportionately affected, experiencing a 29.3% reduction in employment within the sector (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2021).

In Zambia, the pandemic's impact was felt keenly after the first COVID-19 cases were reported on March 18, 2020 (Kasanga et al., 2020). Governmental responses included partial lockdowns initiated on March 20, 2020, which led to the suspension of many business activities and educational operations, exacerbating challenges for employers in the tourism and hospitality sector. The necessity for ongoing tourist visits and events for revenue generation meant that the restrictions severely disrupted the industry's income streams, prompting widespread layoffs and economic difficulties for businesses reliant on continuous cash flow to meet operational costs.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound and varied impact on multiple sectors, primarily through the diminishment of revenue generation capabilities. In response, numerous industries, including hospitality, were compelled to downsize significantly, leading to substantial job losses and a resultant skills mismatch. In 2020 alone, the global hospitality sector saw a reduction to only 272 million jobs from a pre-pandemic high of 334 million (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2021). In Zambia, the effect was similarly severe with significant reductions in workforce, leading to a mismatch in the existing skills landscape as businesses were forced to let go of skilled staff (Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry, 2020). This has led to a situation where the retained workforce may not align with the evolving demands of the post-pandemic job market.

Gallardo (2020) suggests that the success of any organization is largely dependent on the capabilities of its workforce. The hospitality industry, with its specific demands for diverse skill sets ranging from managerial competencies to customer service expertise, faces a critical challenge in maintaining a workforce that aligns with its operational needs. This research, therefore, seeks to assess the impact of the pandemic on the skills matrix within the hospitality industry in Zambia, exploring the extent of the impact and proposing a resilient skills framework to support future sustainability.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to explore the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the skills matrix in the hospitality sector, with a view towards developing a resilient and sustainable skills framework to enhance industry sustainability.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. Identify the skills that were predominant in the hospitality industry in Zambia before and after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Assess the extent to which these skills have been impacted by the pandemic.
3. Examine the strategies employed by the industry for workforce downsizing during the pandemic.
4. Propose a sustainable skills model that could support the industry in maintaining operational resilience and adaptability in the face of future challenges.

2. Literature Review

The global hospitality industry has faced unprecedented challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which precipitated significant job losses and required rapid

adaptation of skills and operational strategies. The literature provides a diverse range of studies that focus on different aspects of these challenges, offering valuable insights but also revealing gaps that this study aims to address.

Table 1: Summary of Empirical Studies

Author(s)	Year	Focus Area	Key Findings	Gaps Identified
Marinko et al.	2021	Impact of pandemics on tourism	Fast recovery post-zero infection	Limited insight into COVID-19 specific effects
Abbas et al.	2021	Transformational potential in tourism due to COVID-19	Innovation as key to adaptation	Lack of focus on employment and skills impact
Dube et al.	2020	Response of global restaurant industry to COVID-19	Decline in patrons due to restrictions	Narrow focus on consumer behavior over workforce impact
Huang et al.	2020	Effect of COVID-19 policies on US hospitality small businesses	20-30% reduction in non-salaried employees	Limited to small businesses, lacks broader industry applicability
Hervie et al.	2022	Effect of COVID-19 on hotel employees in Ghana	Significant impact on employee salaries and conditions	Does not address skills development or recovery strategies

The empirical literature reveals a common theme: the significant impact of COVID-19 on the hospitality industry’s workforce and operational capacity. However, there remains a paucity of studies focusing on the development of sustainable skills models that are tailored to pandemic response and recovery in the hospitality industry.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This research is underpinned by several key theories which collectively inform the development of a sustainable skills framework in the hospitality industry:

1. **General Systems Theory (GST):** GST posits that a system is composed of interrelated parts that affect one another. In the context of hospitality, the industry can be seen as a system where changes in one part (e.g., workforce skills) affect all other parts (e.g., service delivery, customer satisfaction) (Skyttner, 2005).
2. **Resource-Based Theory (RBT):** This theory suggests that the internal resources of an organization, such as skilled human capital, are crucial for gaining a competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). RBT supports the notion that investing in employee skills can differentiate an organization during recovery phases.
3. **Competence-Based Model:** This model underscores the importance of aligning employee competencies with organizational needs to ensure effective job performance (Andreev, 2021). It highlights the need for a competency framework that can adapt to changing operational demands.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study integrates the above theories and articulates the relationship between the pandemic’s impact and the proposed interventions through

skills development. The framework identifies key variables:

- **Independent Variables:** Skills competencies, COVID-19 impact, training and development.
- **Intervening Variable:** Human resource management practices.
- **Dependent Variables:** Job retention, business sustainability.

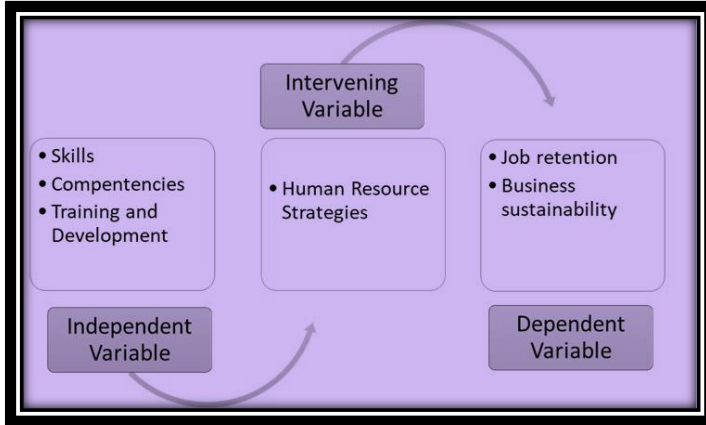


Fig 1: Conceptual Framework Diagram

Description: The diagram illustrates the flow from the pandemic’s impact through organizational responses (training and skills development), moderated by HR practices, and leading to outcomes in job retention and sustainability.

3. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design to systematically depict the characteristics and phenomena observed within the hospitality industry of Lusaka, Zambia. The descriptive approach was chosen for its effectiveness in providing a precise portrayal of participants' behaviors, attitudes, and skills following the COVID-19 pandemic.

A mixed methods approach was adopted, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact on the skills matrix within the hospitality sector. This approach allowed for a robust analysis, facilitating a deeper exploration of the nuanced impacts of the pandemic.

The population of this study comprised employees from 98 hospitality establishments in Lusaka. A sample size of 49 establishments was selected using a stratified random sampling technique, ensuring representation across different types of hospitality services. Data collection was conducted through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, targeting both management and staff. The questionnaires were designed to gather quantitative data on employment changes, skills shifts, and the effectiveness of implemented strategies. In contrast, interviews provided qualitative insights into the personal experiences and perceptions of the employees regarding these changes.

Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), where quantitative data was coded for descriptive statistical analysis. Qualitative

data from interviews were transcribed and thematically analyzed to identify common patterns and themes related to the skills matrix evolution.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Skills Matrix Before and After the Pandemic

The study reveals significant changes in the skills matrix within the hospitality industry due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, essential skills required in the hospitality sector included communication, customer service, teamwork, and attention to detail. Post-pandemic, the skills landscape has shifted notably. The results indicate that new skills such as digital proficiency, health and safety awareness, and crisis management have become increasingly important.

Table 2: Key Skills in Hospitality Industry Before and After COVID-19

Skills Category	Pre-COVID-19	Post-COVID-19
Communication	High	High
Customer Service	High	High
Teamwork	High	Moderate
Attention to Detail	High	Moderate
Digital Proficiency	Moderate	High
Health and Safety	Moderate	High
Crisis Management	Low	High

Impact of COVID-19 on Employment

The study found that the pandemic led to a drastic reduction in employment within the sector, with 65% of organizations recognizing the need for their employees to acquire additional skills to prepare for future crises. Conversely, 35% did not see a significant shift in skills requirements, possibly due to the nature of their specific roles within the industry or due to existing preparedness measures that were already in place.

Adaptation to New Skills

The adaptation to new skills has been uneven across the sector. While some organizations swiftly implemented training programs focusing on digital services and health protocols, others struggled due to limited resources or logistical constraints. The results highlight a critical gap in readiness for sudden industry changes, underscoring the importance of proactive skills development and training.

4.2 Discussion

The pandemic's impact on the hospitality industry's employment and skills matrix has been profound. The shift toward digital proficiency and health and safety skills reflects broader global trends towards digitalization and

public health awareness. Organizations that quickly adapted to these changes managed to mitigate some of the adverse effects of the pandemic, illustrating the value of agility and preparedness in crisis management.

The loss of jobs and the need for new skills have necessitated a reevaluation of training programs and development strategies within the industry. Continuous learning and adaptation appear crucial for sustaining operations and enhancing employee resilience against future disruptions.

Strategic Implications

The findings suggest that strategic workforce planning should be a cornerstone of organizational strategy within the hospitality industry. Identifying skills gaps, aligning skills with specific job roles, and budgeting for skills development are essential components of this planning. These measures would not only ensure that the workforce remains agile and well-equipped to meet evolving industry needs but also enhance the industry's overall resilience and sustainability.

5. Conclusions

The study's examination of the impact of COVID-19 on the skills matrix in the hospitality industry in Lusaka District reveals a dynamic shift in the requisite skills due to the pandemic's unprecedented challenges. Grounded in the General Systems Theory, the findings underscore the interconnectedness of environmental factors and organizational systems, illustrating how external disruptions such as a pandemic can precipitate significant internal changes in operational strategies and workforce requirements.

Key conclusions derived from the research are:

- 1. Shift in Skills Demand:** There is a marked transition from traditional hospitality skills toward digital proficiency, health, safety, and crisis management capabilities. This shift is indicative of a broader need within the industry to adapt to new operational realities and consumer expectations.
- 2. Importance of Agility:** The ability of organizations to rapidly adapt to these changes is crucial. The pandemic has demonstrated that adaptability and resilience are vital traits for sustaining operations during crises.
- 3. Need for Strategic Workforce Planning:** The results support the Competence-Based Model, which stresses the importance of aligning workforce capabilities with organizational goals to achieve competitive advantage. Strategic workforce planning has emerged as a critical need to bridge the gap between current skills and those required to navigate future challenges.

Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, the following strategic recommendations are proposed to enhance resilience and sustainability within the hospitality industry:

- 1. Continuous Skills Development:** Implement ongoing training and development programs to ensure that employees possess up-to-date skills in digital technology, health protocols, and crisis management. This will not only improve individual performance but also enhance the overall service quality and crisis preparedness of the organization.
- 2. Development of a Predictive Skills Matrix Model:** Adopt a predictive skills matrix model that anticipates future skills requirements based on emerging trends and potential crises. This model should integrate data analytics to forecast shifts in skills demands and guide strategic planning.
- 3. Collaboration for Skills Support:** Encourage collaboration between government bodies, industry associations, and educational institutions to support skills development initiatives. Such partnerships can provide funding, resources, and expertise to enhance training programs and adapt them to the changing needs of the industry.
- 4. Incorporate Flexibility in Workforce Planning:** Develop flexible workforce strategies that allow for the rapid scaling up or down of staff and skills in response to fluctuating demand and operational conditions. This approach should include cross-training employees to perform multiple roles within the organization.

Predictive Skills Matrix Model

The proposed Predictive Skills Matrix Model will operate on three levels:

- **Preventive:** Regular assessment of skills inventory against industry benchmarks and trend forecasts to identify potential skills shortages before they become critical.
- **Responsive:** Dynamic adjustment of training programs and workforce deployment based on real-time data on market conditions and operational demands.
- **Strategic:** Long-term planning that involves scenario analysis to prepare for various market conditions, ensuring that the workforce is resilient in the face of future disruptions.

This model aligns with the Resource-Based Theory, emphasizing the strategic management of internal capabilities as a source of competitive advantage. It not only responds to immediate needs but also prepares the organization for future challenges by building a robust and adaptable skills foundation.

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