

Article

Human Resource Skill Adjustment in Service Sector: Predicting Dynamic Capability in Post COVID-19 Work Environment

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Abstract: The havoc caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on hospitality businesses across the world affected the human resource skills of the industry to the extent that managers and industry experts are still finding difficult how best to upgrade the skills of their workforce and enhance their capability to withstand future disruptions. It is based on this problem that this research investigated the effect of human resource skill adjustment on the dynamic capability of hospitality businesses in sub-Saharan Africa post the COVID-19 work environment. The study employed cross-sectional survey design with a total population of two hundred and twenty participants drawn from sixty hospitality businesses in the south-eastern part of Nigeria. Formulated research hypotheses were analysed with linear regression. The results of the research demonstrated that human resource skill adjustment predicted the dynamic capability of hospitality businesses. The study concludes that human resource skill adjustment measured with upskilling and reskilling methodologies predicted the dynamic capability. The implication of the finding is that managers and operators of hospitality businesses should implement human resource skill adjustment in all the functional areas of their management to enable each section or department to attain its goals equally, and enhance the dynamic capability of the industry.

Keywords: COVID-19; dynamic capability; hospitality industry; human resource skill adjustment; post COVID-19

1. Introduction

The unprecedented effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on hospitality businesses across the globe is alarming to the extent that most of them are still struggling to bounce back from the disruptions. These adverse effects cut across all the functional areas of management; finance, production, marketing and human resource (Pogodayev 2013; Olejarz et al. 2018; Rahman et al. 2021; Zayed et al. 2021; Oliinyk et al. 2021; Kryshtal et al. 2022; Zsuzsanna et al. 2022). However, it was revealed that one of the elements adversely affected by the pandemic is human resources, which happens to be the engine room of the organisation (Edeh et al. 2021). Human resources is the vehicle through which the goals of the organisation are conveyed to the desired destination (Edeh et al. 2020). Zayed et al. (2021) opined that the

dislocation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses, especially the hospitality sector, would require the industry years to recover, except if their human resources are well-equipped with the right skills. On the one hand, research has revealed that the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on hospitality businesses was significantly on their human resource skills, which would require a huge amount of capital to transform (Wang 2022; Aguinaldo 2020). In addition, Browne (2021) suggested that human resources skill in the hospitality sector must be modified in line with the work culture post the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, for the hospitality sector to enhance its dynamic capability, which is the ability to utilize its resources to overcome the adverse effect caused by COVID-19 pandemic, its human resources skills need to be adjusted through upskilling and reskilling methodologies.

In congruence with the above contention, White and Rittie (2022) maintained that an organisation can hardly leverage on opportunities if its human resource skills are not in tune with the current realities in the industry. Acknowledging this contention, Agha (2022) admonished that the hospitality industry requires upskilling and reskilling of its workforce due to the setback the sector had witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic to build a higher level of resilience. On the other hand, upskilling is a strong tool that can be employed to help hospitality human resources to stay motivated, enhance their emotional intelligence and improve their work satisfaction (Zeynalli and Rahimli 2022; Zeynalli 2021; Ladislav et al. 2021; Confederation of Tourism & Hospitality 2019). Hospitality business experts have advised that, for managers and hospitality business owners to discourage their human resources from moving to their competitors, reskilling should be implemented to avoid spending a huge amount of money for another recruitment process (Redi 2021; World Travel & Tourism Council 2021). In addition, a survey conducted by PwC in 2020 showed that about 93% of business executives affirmed that upskilling and reskilling approaches increase productivity, talent acquisition and talent retention (Tandemhr 2022).

Drawing from the above, dynamic capability of hospitality businesses could be improved through the adjustment of their human resource skill. Dynamic capability has helped both small and multinational organisations in terms of high sales volume, return on investment, innovation, entrepreneurial development and positive corporate citizenship (Edeh et al. 2020; Ugboego et al. 2022; Ezenwakwelu et al. 2021; Hieu 2020). Jhony et al. (2020) alluded that in a dynamic business environment, businesses must strive to build a strong dynamic capability so that when turbulence arises, they would be able to withstand it. Research has shown that dynamic capability helps organisations to sense an environmental crisis and plan how to reconfigure its structures (Cyfert et al. 2021; Matwiejczuk et al. 2020; Apriza and Utami 2018). Akpan et al. (2021) added that after sensing the environmental forces that disrupted the organisation's operation, the next course of action is for managers to reconfigure the affected areas.

Nonetheless, trends of research such as Balinchenko (2022); Hlobenko et al. (2022); Akpan et al. (2021); Ezenwakwelu et al. (2021); Hieu (2020); Saenchaiyathon and Liengjindathaworn (2019); Akintokunbo (2018) have investigated dynamic capability as a criterion factor with other predictor variables other than human resource skill adjustment. Secondly, most of the trends of thought mentioned above carried out their investigation in other countries and industries. Thirdly, even when such studies were carried out, no studies have investigated how human resource skill adjustment could enhance the dynamic capability of hospitality businesses in a post-COVID-19 business setting. This has created a huge research gap that this study has filled. It was this vacuum that motivated the researchers to investigate the effect of human resource skill adjustment on the dynamic capability of hospitality businesses in sub-Saharan Africa in the post-COVID-19 work environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Human Resource Skill Adjustment

The concept of human resource skill adjustment was popularized by Edeh et al. (2021) in their research "Organisational learning: COVID-19 strategy for human resource skill adjustment". Human resource skill adjustment has to do with the modifications of

employees' skill, knowledge and abilities which would enhance their performance in the organisation (Edeh et al. 2021). Human resource skill adjustment is also conceived as the process of improving the skills of the organisational workforce (Rhea et al. 2022). This improvement ranges across the adjustment of workers' skills to fit into the new work environment orchestrated by COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, to meet the current customer needs post the COVID-19 pandemic, the hospitality industry must update the service delivery skills of their human resources such as home service delivery as well as the use of social media platforms. Further, Li (2022) is of the view that skill enhancement that does not conform with the realities that post the COVID-19 pandemic would not be sustainable. This is the basis for why Borsetti (2021) argued that managers of service-oriented businesses need to upskill the skills of their employees to be able to adapt to the changing work environment. ThuraiSelvam (2022) concurred with Borsetti (2021), and remarked that human resources that have acquired other skills not in conformity with post the COVID-19 pandemic need to reskill their knowledge in order to cope with new customer demand. In line with the above submission, ThuraiSelvam (2022) argued that a new work attitude and culture should be learned by every employee in the service sector to avoid being alienated in the industry. Meanwhile, Browne (2021) maintained that upskilling and reskilling of human resources should be a paramount responsibility of hospitality business practitioners across the globe if they want to remain in business. Advancing the contention of other scholars, Mazur (2021) suggested that human resource professionals in charge of training should as a matter of urgency implement the adjustment of human resource skills for high performance to achieve organisational goals. Smith (2021) accentuated that the major reasons for human resource skill adjustment are to enhance pay, work–life balance, job stability, technological skills, career advancement and marketability.

Drawing from the above, research has shown that human resource skill adjustment validated dimensions include upskilling and reskilling (Edeh et al. 2021). Upskilling refers to a training model with a specific focus on introducing employees to new skills, competencies and knowledge required to perform a particular job different from the previous skills they possess (Edeh et al. 2021). On the other hand, Baker (2021) opined that upskilling is a training method designed by the human resources professional to prepare an employee for a higher responsibility and succession plan. On the one hand, reskilling is the retraining of employees to equip them with new skills they would require in their new promoted job position (Li 2022; Edeh et al. 2021). In clarity, upskilling is a type of training that an employee requires as a result of changes in the work environment such as the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, a front desk officer in the hotel whose former responsibility is to report to the office and receive guests, before the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, would now be trained (upskilled) to work from home by using the organisation's web platform to check guests into the hotel rooms. Reskilling on another hand is a type of training that is given to an employee for the purpose of occupying a new job position that is entirely different from the former role. Lamba and Mohan (2022) affirmed that reskilling of human resources in the hospitality sector is necessary for succession planning, especially in the post-COVID-19 pandemic work setting. What this implies is that such an employee or human resource cannot function effectively in the new job position unless training is offered to them. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, some employees changed jobs and thereafter, when restrictions were lifted, they did not report back to work. Thus, in order to discourage loss of performance time, managers equipped another employee who was formerly in another section with the skill needed in the vacant department to take over the responsibility of that employee that failed to return to work after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nevertheless, prior research on human resource skill adjustment has not been widely studied due to its recent entry into the human resource management discipline by Edeh et al. (2021); but very few investigated the phenomenon with regard to upskilling and reskilling of human resource skills. Edeh et al. (2021) examined the effect of organisational learning on human resource skill adjustment in the manufacturing sector of Nigeria. Their

results revealed that organisational learning dimensions (exploration learning, exploitation learning) have a significant positive effect on human resource skill adjustment indicators (upskilling, reskilling). Li (2022) reviewed the significance of reskilling and upskilling of future workforce in Industry 4.0 and suggested that employees and organisations should be committed to reskilling and upskilling to enhance the career development of the workforce. Yaseen et al. (2022) analysed the relevance of upskilling and reskilling of employees in the post-COVID-19 work economy and recommend that organisations and government agencies across the world should invest in skill enhancement of their human capital to ameliorate the damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Chen (2021) analysed the need for employee skill enhancement in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic in formal organisations. Although the above research was based on a literature review, it concluded that human resource professionals should address the issue of job skill enhancement to fit into the post-COVID-19 era. Owoeye et al. (2020) empirically examined the association between skill enhancement and the performance of the Nigerian Police Force with the mediating effect of workplace commitment and discovered that skill enhancement practices improve the performance of Police Officers in Nigeria. Thus, the current study differs from the abovementioned research due to its originality in having empirically investigated the effect of human resource skill adjustment on the dynamic capability of hospitality businesses in Nigeria.

2.2. Dynamic Capability

Dynamic capability has dominated business literature as a leveraging factor against negative adversaries (Ugboego et al. 2022; Akpan et al. 2021; Ezenwakwelu et al. 2021; Matwiejczuk et al. 2020; Sukaris et al. 2019; Ofoegbu and Onuoha 2018). From the word “dynamic”, it could be deduced to mean an unstable measure or something that changes overtime. However, in the business context, dynamic capability refers to an organisation’s strategy that is used by managers to identify opportunities in the external work environment. Other organisational scholars had argued that dynamic capability is concerned with management policy that is targeted at integrating resources of the organisation to fight against negative forces intended to disrupt the operations of the enterprise (Jhony et al. 2020; Kurtz and Varvakis 2016). Saenchaiyathon and Liengjindathaworn (2019) admitted that dynamic capability is any strategy employed by an organisation to respond to environmental turbulences. Narrowing it to the present realities in the business world, Apriza and Utami (2018) affirmed that dynamic capability is designed by management to prevent and adjust to changing uncontrollable environmental forces. Further, Akintokunbo (2018) asserted that any effort put in place by organisational leaders to adjust to changes is dynamic capability. Thus, in the event of understanding the factors affecting the smooth running of the organisation, business managers are expected to sense opportunities, threats, weaknesses and to deploy their strength to leverage on the available opportunities in the market. Research has shown that one of the major strengths that an organisation has is human resources; therefore, business owners need to invest in them through constant skill improvement to boost their dynamic capability (Zsuzsanna et al. 2022; Hieu 2020; Saenchaiyathon and Liengjindathaworn 2019; Matysiak et al. 2018). This implies that an improvement on the skills of the human resource would automatically enhance their dynamic capability. Murschetz et al. (2020) added that possessing dynamic capability infers that hospitality businesses would put on sensing capability and reconfiguration capability to be able to withstand any disruptions in their respective business environment.

From the foregoing, management of hospitality businesses across the globe need to embrace dynamic capability measured with sensing capability and reconfiguration capability in order to make changes in all the functional areas of its operations, which is likely to increase their profitability and sustainability. Albeit other researchers had enumerated other measures of dynamic capability, this research would be anchored on sensing capability and reconfiguration capability as a result of their reliability and validity confirmation by other researchers (see Ugboego et al. 2022; Akpan et al. 2021; Cyfert et al.

2021; Ezenwakwelu et al. 2021). This study would leverage on sensing capability and reconfiguration capability to develop research hypotheses.

2.3. Upskilling and Sensing Capability

In order to improve dynamic capability of hospitality businesses, the workforce needs to be upskilled to enable them to fit into a post-COVID-19 work environment. Again, it was revealed that after upskilling the human resource in the organisation, the workforce would be able to join forces with the management to anticipate for any challenge that may befall the organisation (Li 2022; Zamlynskyi et al. 2022; Mazur 2021; Ladislav et al. 2021). It is against this contention that Scheffers (2020) opined that human resource skill in the service sector needs to be constantly upgraded in line with the changing realities in the work environment. Supporting the argument above, Smith (2021) is of the view that an upskilled workforce is a strategic advantage against any competitor in the same industry. In alliance with Smith's postulation, Waddill (2021) added that managers of service-oriented businesses across the world should understand that their environment is not static but dynamic in nature; therefore, the earlier they start upgrading the skills of their workforce the better. In another submission, a prior study admonished that for human resource to participate effectively in detecting external forces that have the capacity to influence the organisation negatively, they should be constantly equipped with a recent skill that is relevant in their industry (Edeh et al. 2020). It is based on these postulations that the first research hypothesis is formulated.

Hypothesis H1. *Upskilling has a significant positive effect on sensing capability.*

2.4. Reskilling and Reconfiguration Capability

Reskilling, as explained in the literature of this study, is aimed at advancing the careers of human resources for the benefit of the organisation. Thus, upskilling human resources in the hospitality sector, especially in the post-COVID-19 work environment, would have a great positive influence on building a strong dynamic capability through reconfiguration capability. Hence, research has revealed that the skill shortage engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic in the formal workplace would be filled by the reskilling of other workers to avoid loss of a production period (Half 2022; Zayed et al. 2021). Cyfert et al. (2021) contended that the reconfiguration of dislocated areas in the organisation can be built if managers are willing to train their workforce with new skills that are required in the industry. In addition, Edeh et al. (2020) posit that in the course of leveraging the opportunities available in the business environment, workers should be equipped with relevant skills they would require to perform their jobs. However, Agrawal et al. (2020) maintained that reconfiguring the hospitality service areas in a post-COVID-19 economy is dependent on the amount of training the human resource managers are willing to implement. Therefore, the improvement or enhancement of organisational dynamic capability is a function of human resource reskilling. Based on the above contentions, the second research hypothesis is hereby formulated.

Hypothesis H2. *Reskilling has a significant positive effect on reconfiguration.*

Figure 1 below shows the conceptual framework for the study. Human resource skill adjustment is the predictor variable while dynamic capability is the criterion variable. The dimensions of human resource skill adjustment are upskilling and reskilling. On the other hand, the indicators of dynamic capability include sensing capability and reconfiguration capability.

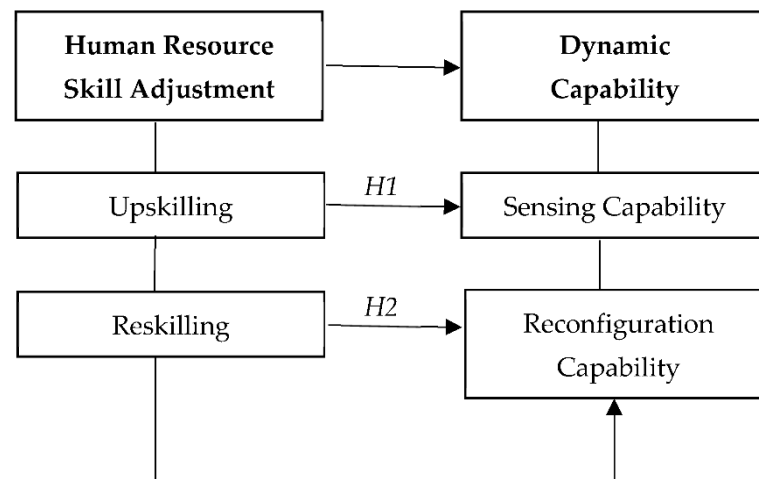


Figure 1. Conceptual framework. Source: Authors Conceptualization.

2.5. Theoretical Underpinning

The theory that best explains this study is the contingency theory of socialization which was propounded by [Feldman \(1976\)](#). The theory argued that there is no one best way to make adjustments with regards to business organisation but changes depend on the situation and the business environment ([Edeh et al. 2020](#)). This implies that upskilling and reskilling of human resources in hospitality businesses could be the best methods to modify the capabilities, skills, knowledge and behaviour of the workforce which would enhance their dynamic to withstand the disruptions engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa. Lastly, the theory aimed at bridging the gap for socialization of employees with the new work environment (post COVID-19), which management of hospitality businesses perceived as huge expenditure.

3. Research Methodology

The research design employed in this study is a cross-sectional survey design that supports the use of a primary instrument such as a questionnaire to collect research information from respondents once at a particular geographical location or organisation ([Ghauri et al. 2020](#); [Cooper and Schindler 2014](#)). The study also deployed a deductive research approach which relies more on the positivism philosophy and affirms the use of quantitative data that must be analysed and interpreted for policymaking in the industry wherein the research was conducted ([Sekaran and Bougie 2016](#); [Saunders et al. 2009](#)). The target population for the study is sixty (60) registered 4-star hotels with the Enugu State Ministry of Commerce & Tourism, south east region of Nigeria, with a sample frame of eight hundred and twenty (820) comprising human resource managers, operations manager, accountant, supervisors and low-level employees. A sample size of two hundred and sixty-three (263) was calculated from the sample frame of 820 with [Krejcie and Morgan \(1970\)](#). Regarding ethical consent, the participants were assured that the data provided would be used specifically for research purposes only. Secondly, the participants also advised the researchers not to mention their names and organisation in the research. Thereafter, an agreement was reached between the participants and researchers that their consent shall be respected. It was after that that the participants informed the researchers to give them a maximum of three weeks to enable them to study the research questions and respond. Two hundred and sixty-three (263) questionnaires were distributed to the respondents one-to-one since COVID-19 protocols were no longer in effect in the south-eastern region of Nigeria. After the three (3) weeks, the researchers collected the instrument from the participants and discovered that only two hundred and twenty (220) of the questionnaires were correctly filled while forty-three (43) copies were filled wrongly. Thus, it was the copies that were filled correctly that were found valid and used for the analysis. Regarding measurement of variables, the [Edeh et al. \(2021\)](#) 16-item validated and tested Human Resource Skills

Adjustment Questionnaire (HRSAQ) that contained reskilling and upskilling was utilized, while the Ezenwakwelu et al. (2021) 17-item reliable Dynamic Capability Questionnaire (DCQ) containing sensing capability and reconfiguration capability was used. Regarding the method of data analysis, participants’ demographic profiles (gender, age bracket, working experience, educational level) were analysed with frequency distribution while linear regression served as a statistical tool that was used to analyse the formulated research hypotheses with the aid of the IBM Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS 21.0).

4. Results

Table 1 below shows the results of participants’ demographic characteristics which indicate that 80 participants representing 36.4% and 140 respondents representing 63.6% are males. The age bracket result revealed that 49 respondents representing 22.3% fall within 18–35 years, 108 participants representing 49.1% and 63 participants representing 28.6% fall within 46 years and above. The working experience of the respondents indicates that 87 participants representing 39.5% have worked between 1 and 5 years; 122 participants representing 55.5% have worked between 6 and 11 years and 11 respondents representing 5.0 have worked for 12 years and above. The educational level of participants shows that 50 respondents representing 22.7% hold a diploma certificate; 118 participants representing 53.6% hold a Bachelor’s degree; 41 respondents representing 18.6% hold a Master’s degree; and 11 participants representing 5.0% hold a PhD degree.

Table 1. Participants’ profiles.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	80	36.4
Male	140	63.6
Age Bracket		
18–35 years	49	22.3
36–45 years	108	49.1
46 years & above	63	28.6
Working Experience		
1–5 years	87	39.5
6–11 years	122	55.5
12 years & above	11	5
Educational level		
Diploma certificate	50	22.7
Bachelor’s degree	118	53.6
Master’s degree	41	18.6
PhD degree	11	5

Source: Research Survey.

Table 2 below shows the hypotheses results of the study which revealed that human resource skill adjustment dimensions have a significant effect on dynamic capability measures. Specifically, the hypothesis one result shows that upskilling has a significant positive effect on the sensing capability with a moderate coefficient determination of 0.652^a, and a 0.000 level of significance which is less than 0.0001. On the other hand, the hypothesis two result shows that reskilling has a significant positive effect on reconfiguration capability with a high coefficient of determination of 0.748^a, and a 0.000 significance level that is less than 0.0001. In addition, R² of the models shows that 43% and 56% of the total variation in upskilling and reskilling can be explained by sensing capability and reconfiguration capability with the difference between R² and adjusted R² less than 5% indicating an absence of sample error. The decision to reject or accept the null hypotheses is based on the calculated F values which are greater than the tabulated (160.944, 276.335 > 3.89). Based on the above result, this research rejects the null hypotheses and accepts the alternate hypotheses and

states that human resource skill adjustment has a significant positive effect on the dynamic capability of hospitality businesses.

Table 2. Hypotheses result.

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	T-Stat.	B	df	N	F Stat.	Std. Error	Sig.
0.652 ^a	0.425	0.422	12.686	0.652 *	3.89	220	160.944	0.047	0.000
0.748 ^a	0.559	0.557	16.623	0.748 *	3.89	220	276.335	0.038	0.000

Predictor: Human resource skill adjustment; *Criterion:* Dynamic capability. *Note:* ^a (Coefficient of determination); * (standard coefficient).

5. Discussion

The results from Table 2 above demonstrated that human resource skill adjustment predicted the dynamic capability of hospitality businesses. In specific terms, it was discovered that upskilling has a significant positive effect on sensing capability. What this finding implies is that upskilling of human resources in a post-COVID-19 work environment is essential for strengthening the sensing capability of hospitality businesses. This finding corroborates the Edeh et al. (2021) result which revealed that human resource skill adjustment is a function of organisational learning in a post-COVID-19 business work environment. The finding of hypothesis one also corroborates the Li (2022) result which indicated that both human resources and business owners should be committed to upskilling and reskilling to improve the career development in their workplaces. Research has also shown that in order to navigate the unprecedented effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, employees' skills need to be upskilled for them to function effectively in a post-COVID-19 work environment (Carnevale and Hatak 2020). It was also revealed that due to the havoc caused by COVID-19, managers and owners of service-based businesses across the globe need to upskill their workforce to enable them to compete in a post-COVID-19 work atmosphere (Bieńkowska et al. 2022). Secondly, reskilling was found to have a significant positive effect on reconfiguration capability. This shows that the reskilling of human resources that were referred to as the engine of the hospitality industry to a great extent enhances the reconfiguration capability of hospitality businesses. This result is in congruence with the study of Chen (2021) which focused on the influence of the COVID-19 crisis on human resource practitioners and shows that leaders of hospitality businesses across the world should focus on the job skills enhancement of their employees to enable them to fit into the post-COVID-19 business world. A similar result indicated that skill enhancement in the face of COVID-19 predicted the commitment of employees and enhances enterprise performance (Owoeye et al. 2020). In addition, the Yaseen et al. (2022) findings indicated that upskilling and reskilling are the new human resource skill enhancement methodologies in a post-COVID-19 work setting.

6. Conclusions and Implications

Drawing from the findings of this research, the study concludes that human resource skill adjustment measured with upskilling and reskilling methodologies predicted the dynamic capability of hospitality businesses, which was scaled with sensing capability and reconfiguration capability. These findings demonstrated that the success of hospitality businesses post the COVID-19 pandemic depends on upskilling and reskilling of their human resources, who are the major stakeholders in the discharge of organisational goals. From the findings, it was discovered that upskilling of human resources in the hospitality industry would motivate them with regards to job satisfaction and affective commitment. In addition, reskilling of hospitality business human resources would enhance career advancement of employees in the industry, thereby promoting smooth succession planning for the managers and professionals in the industry. Again, since the business environment of hospitality businesses across the globe is dynamic, it therefore implies that human resource experts and professionals need to focus on the skill adjustment of their employees to be able

to meet with the current demand of their customers. Regarding the implication of the study, managers and operators of hospitality businesses should implement human resource skill adjustment in all the functional areas of their management to enable each section or department to attain their goals equally, and to enhance the dynamic capability of the industry. The study also admonished policymakers, institutions and organised hospitality business professional bodies to implement the findings of this study, as this would strengthen the industry in terms of high productivity and profitability and discourage a high turnover of human resources, which strengthens the dynamic capability of the industry. However, the study is not exempted from limitations, as the methodology employed needs to be visited by other scholars who are interested to further investigate the phenomenon. Such a limitation vacuum could be filled by incorporating quantitative and qualitative approaches in future research for the same phenomenon before a generalization can be drawn. Lastly, since the research was carried out in a sub-Saharan African work environment, the findings of the study may not be generalized in other industries and countries.

Regarding suggestions for future study, this study advocates for more empirical investigation to be carried out in different parts of the world, especially in the developed economies, for detailed research gaps to be filled, since human resource skill adjustment is still a growing concept. Secondly, other statistical tools should be used to find out the effect of human resource skill adjustment on other variables and different industries, as this would increase empirical evidence in the study area. Lastly, a reward such as monetary should be employed as a moderating influence on human resource skill adjustment and dynamic capability to ascertain whether financial inducement would boost the dynamic capability of organisations outside of skill enhancement.

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