



CORE COMPETENCE AND BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN TARABA STATE

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ABSTRACT: *This paper investigated the connection between core competence, that is, operational knowledge and team leadership, and business sustainability, as indicated by customer satisfaction and revenue growth, in the hospitality industry of Wukari Metropolis, Taraba State, Nigeria. The study was inspired by the long-standing problems of hospitality companies, including workforce inefficiencies, poor leadership practices, and service innovation, which lower customer retention and financial performance. The research design adopted was a quantitative one, and the data were gathered using structured questionnaires conducted with 130 employees and customers of ten sampled hospitality companies. A valid sample size was calculated using the Taro Yamane formula, and a stratified random sampling method was relied upon to ensure that respondents were represented fairly. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied, and Pearson correlation analysis was performed with SPSS version 27. The results showed that operational knowledge is significantly and positively related to customer satisfaction ($r = 0.771$, $p < 0.05$) while team leadership is moderately related to revenue growth ($r = 0.645$, $p < 0.05$). Such findings show that better operational knowledge leads to improved service delivery, efficiency, and customer experiences, resulting in high customer satisfaction and revenue. Equally, team leadership was deduced to be essential in encouraging teamwork and effectiveness, but operational knowledge was identified as the better predictor of sustainability results. The paper concludes that the ongoing training of the staff, optimization of the processes, and knowledge-sharing practices are essential to enhancing the operational competence and leadership performance.*

KEYWORDS: Core Competence, Operational Knowledge, Team Leadership, Customer Satisfaction, and Revenue Growth.



INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry is a major driver of economic development and employment worldwide, accounting for a significant share of global revenue and Gross Domestic Product (GDP). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2023), the global tourism and hospitality sector contributed \$9.2 trillion to GDP in 2022, representing 10.9% of global economic activity. The industry has witnessed steady growth due to increasing globalization, technological advancements, and growing consumer demand for travel and leisure. Emerging trends, such as experiential tourism and sustainable practices, have further spurred investment and innovation in the sector. Between 2010 and 2020, global tourism arrivals grew from 948 million to over 1.5 billion, reflecting the expanding market size and opportunities for revenue generation (UNWTO, 2021).

The economic benefits of the global hospitality industry extend beyond direct revenue generation to include job creation, infrastructure development, and foreign direct investment. For instance, the WTTC (2023) reported that the sector supported over 334 million jobs globally in 2022, accounting for approximately 10% of global employment. The sector also plays a pivotal role in promoting cultural exchange and fostering global connectivity, enhancing the economic resilience of many countries.

In Nigeria, the hospitality industry is a growing contributor to the economy, driven by domestic tourism, international business travel, and cultural festivals. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023) estimates that the tourism and hospitality sector contributed approximately ₦4.2 trillion to GDP in 2022, representing about 3.2% of national output. Despite challenges such as infrastructure deficits, insecurity, and inconsistent government policies, the sector has shown resilience and potential for growth.

Globally, the hospitality industry is a significant driver of economic growth, contributing substantially to employment, tourism, and cultural exchange. In 2022 alone, the global hospitality industry was valued at approximately \$4.5 trillion, underscoring its importance to global economies (Zhukova et al., 2023). However, despite its prominence, the industry faces numerous challenges, including operational inefficiencies, workforce instability, and the inability to adapt to technological advancements.

These challenges are particularly pronounced in emerging markets, where the hospitality sector often grapples with inadequate resources, poor team leadership, and lack of operational knowledge by workers (Pacatang et al., 2024). Effective team leadership has been identified as a critical success factor in the hospitality industry, fostering collaboration, motivation, and innovation. Yet, poor team leadership and communication has frequently led to misalignment and reduced efficiency across many organizations worldwide (Ozbasar et al., 2024).

Operational knowledge is yet another key area of concern, as employees often lack the necessary training and expertise to deliver high-quality services, as further exacerbated by the limited adoption of digital tools in meeting modern customer expectations (Zhukova et al., 2023). Although the scholars further contended that digital transformation has revolutionized the global

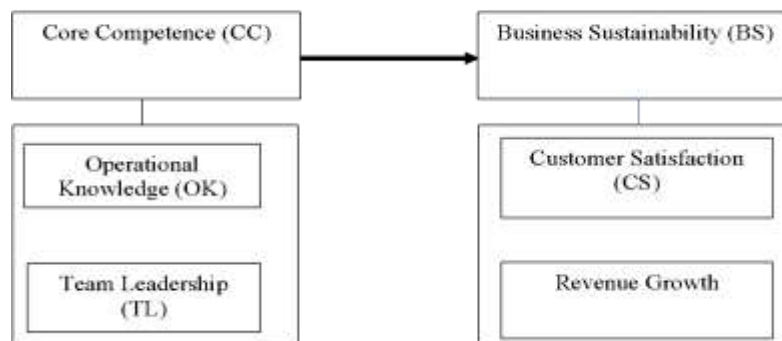


hospitality industry, many establishments, particularly in developing regions, struggle to implement these technologies, resulting in operational bottlenecks and a failure to optimize customer experiences. This study therefore set to achieve the following specific objectives:

- To determine the relationship between operational knowledge and customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry in Taraba State.
- To determine the relationship between operational knowledge and revenue growth rate in the hospitality industry in Taraba State.

Theoretical Framework

This section provides for extensive comprehension of present conditions and future possibilities of business sustainability of the hospitality industry in Taraba State, and Nigeria at large. It emphasizes understanding the importance of business strategic capabilities and its inherent weaknesses to stay competitive in the market place.



Source: *Conceptual Framework, adopted from the works of Martínez-Falcó et al. (2023).*

Core Competence

Core competence refers to the unique combination of skills, knowledge, and resources that an organization possesses, which allows it to deliver value in a way that is difficult for competitors to imitate (Aisha et al., 2019). It is that fundamental to an organization's competitive advantage and long-term sustainability. These competencies are typically deeply embedded within the organization's culture, processes, and systems and are difficult to replicate by others.

One of the most widely recognized core competencies in the hospitality industry is exceptional customer service (Pacatang et al., 2024). A hotel or restaurant's ability to anticipate and fulfill guest needs, offer personalized services, and resolve problems efficiently is a major differentiator. Employees' interpersonal skills and their ability to deliver service with warmth and professionalism can become a core competence that builds a loyal customer base.



A well-established brand reputation is another core competence that many hospitality businesses leverage. This reputation is not just about the physical assets like rooms and amenities but is grounded in the trust and expectations they have cultivated over time. Their ability to maintain a consistent brand promise across different markets is a key strength (Baker & Cameron, 2008).

In the hospitality sector, what constitutes a core competence today may no longer be sufficient tomorrow. Companies need to continuously innovate to maintain their edge. For example, a hotel chain's reputation for excellence might eventually plateau if they do not innovate in their service offerings or technology integration. Despite this, in an increasingly tech-driven world, integrating cutting-edge technologies to enhance guest experiences is becoming a core competence for many hospitality companies. This might involve providing mobile check-ins, offering advanced room management systems, or leveraging artificial intelligence to personalize services. Hotels like Marriott have used mobile technology to allow guests to control room settings and request services via their smartphones, demonstrating how technological integration can create a competitive edge (Ivanov et al., 2019).

Operational Knowledge

Operational knowledge is a concept mostly used in knowledge management, organizational learning or learning organization (Martínez-Falcó et al., 2023). It encompasses the practical expertise and skills necessary for individuals to perform specific tasks and processes within an organization effectively. This type of knowledge is distinct from theoretical understanding, as it is directly applied to real-world scenarios and is often acquired through hands-on experience and training.

Operational knowledge refers to the practical know-how, skills, and expertise required in carrying out tasks effectively within an organization (Stanley et al., 2001). It is the knowledge employees gain from hands-on experience, training, and continuous learning in their specific roles. This type of knowledge is crucial for efficiency, consistency, and productivity in any industry.

Operational knowledge refers to actionable knowledge that can be effectively utilized in practical settings, contrasting with encyclopedic knowledge, which serves as a theoretical background (Srinivasa, 2012). The scholar further posited that this type of knowledge is crucial in various contexts, including community settings and military operations, where it is essential for decision-making and operational efficiency. The aggregation of operational knowledge often involves local customization and application, allowing communities to adapt globally recognized knowledge to their specific needs.

Team Leadership

Team leadership is a management approach that focuses on collaboration, empowerment, and shared responsibility among team members. It is particularly vital in the hospitality sector, where service quality, customer satisfaction, and employee engagement play crucial roles in organizational success (Northouse & Lee, 2021).



Team leadership is crucial for organizational success, focusing on directing and coordinating members to achieve collective goals (Padmasari et al., 2023). Effective team leaders help members reach a synergistic threshold, where group outcomes surpass individual efforts (Zaccaro et al., 2008). Leadership in teams can arise from various sources and encompasses key functions that address critical team needs and regulate behavior (Morgeson et al., 2010). As organizations face increasingly complex tasks and globalization, team leadership becomes even more significant, requiring leaders to equip, empower, and harmonize teamwork (Mokgwane & Omobonike, 2021).

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction plays a pivotal role in the hospitality sector and serves as a key dimension of business sustainability. As the industry relies heavily on repeat business and positive word-of-mouth, maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction is crucial for sustainable growth and competitive advantage (Kotler et al., 2017). Satisfied customers are more likely to return, recommend the service to others, and leave positive online reviews, which collectively contribute to long-term business viability (Xiang et al., 2015). This alignment between customer satisfaction and sustainability emphasizes not only meeting but exceeding customer expectations through consistent quality and innovation.

Sustainability initiatives in hospitality are increasingly shaping customer satisfaction. As consumers become more environmentally conscious, they are choosing to engage with businesses that reflect their values (Chua & Han, 2022). Hotels and resorts that implement eco-friendly practices, such as reducing plastic use, conserving water, and sourcing food locally, are often viewed more favorably by guests. These practices resonate with a growing segment of eco-conscious travelers, who appreciate the ethical considerations and environmental responsibility of the businesses they support (Chen & Peng, 2012).

According to Line and Hanks (2016), customers are better served when their employees have a clear understanding of what the customer needs. This places much emphasis on the operational understanding of the employees about the task to perform. It is therefore important for organizations to value operational knowledge as one of the key factors in the hospitality sector during recruitment.

Moreover, customer satisfaction derived from sustainability efforts has a direct impact on brand perception and customer retention. When guests perceive that a business is genuinely committed to sustainability, they form a stronger emotional connection to the brand, leading to greater brand loyalty (Han et al., 2010). This is particularly evident in luxury segments, where customers are willing to pay a premium for experiences that align with their environmental values. For example, eco-lodges and green-certified hotels often command higher prices due to the added value of sustainability, which enhances customer satisfaction and supports the overall business model (Font et al., 2017).

The link between customer satisfaction and business sustainability is further reinforced through social media and online reviews. Positive experiences related to sustainability are frequently shared on platforms like TripAdvisor, creating a cycle of positive reinforcement. A study by



Mariani and Borghi (2023) found that hotels with visible sustainability practices tend to receive higher guest ratings and more favorable reviews. These online endorsements play a crucial role in attracting new customers, as potential guests increasingly rely on peer reviews to make informed choices. As such, customer satisfaction tied to sustainability becomes a powerful marketing tool, reinforcing a company's market position and contributing to its long-term success (Xiang et al., 2017).

Revenue Growth

Revenue growth is a fundamental aspect of business sustainability in the hospitality sector, as it ensures financial viability, supports long-term investments, and enhances overall competitiveness. Sustainable revenue generation is not solely about increasing profits but also involves maintaining steady growth through responsible business practices, innovation, and customer-centric strategies. Hotels, restaurants, and other hospitality businesses that adopt sustainable models of revenue generation are better positioned to withstand economic fluctuations, attract eco-conscious consumers, and improve operational efficiency (Jones et al., 2016). By integrating sustainability into revenue strategies, hospitality firms can balance profitability with social and environmental responsibility, ensuring long-term success.

A key driver of revenue growth in sustainable hospitality is the increasing consumer demand for environmentally responsible accommodations and services. As travelers become more conscious of their environmental impact, they prefer businesses that align with their values (Gao et al., 2020). Green-certified hotels, such as those with LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) or EarthCheck certifications, attract more guests and can charge premium rates for their sustainable offerings. Research suggests that eco-friendly hotels experience higher occupancy rates and stronger customer loyalty, both of which contribute to revenue stability and growth (Han et al., 2011). This shift in consumer preferences demonstrates that sustainability is not just an ethical obligation but also a profitable business strategy that enhances long-term revenue streams.

Technology and operational efficiency also play a significant role in revenue growth within sustainable hospitality. Energy-efficient systems, water conservation measures, and waste reduction initiatives lead to substantial cost savings, which, in turn, improve profitability. Hilton's LightStay program helped the company reduce energy consumption by 20%, directly impacting operational costs and enhancing revenue margins (Hilton, 2021). These cost reductions enable businesses to reinvest in guest experiences, marketing, and technological innovations, further driving revenue growth while maintaining sustainability.

Diversifying revenue streams through sustainable tourism and unique guest experiences is another way hospitality businesses achieve sustainable revenue growth. Many hotels and resorts are expanding their offerings beyond traditional lodging by incorporating wellness tourism, eco-adventure packages, and local cultural experiences. Wellness tourism, in particular, has become a lucrative market, with travelers willing to pay premium prices for health-focused amenities, such as organic cuisine, spa treatments, and yoga retreats (Chen & Peng, 2012). Sustainable hotels that integrate these experiences can attract high-spending guests and increase revenue while promoting responsible tourism practices (Font et al., 2017).



METHODOLOGY

The section highlights the methodology used to explore the connection between core competencies (operational knowledge and team leadership) and business sustainability (customer satisfaction and revenue growth) in the hospitality industry. The research design, the field or location of study, the population, sample size, sampling method, data collection tool, and procedure of data analysis are emphasized in the methodology. The research design used was a quantitative research design. It was used because its standardization procedures improve the level of reliability and validity. Quantitative studies also give an opportunity to make evidence-based conclusions with the help of statistical indicators, which minimizes biases and allows comparison of the results obtained in various populations and situations (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018).

Participants

The study population comprised 200 employees and customers who were selected based on 10 resorts, hotels, and restaurants. The sample size of 130 was then determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula, which gives a simple, reliable, and statistically sound way of estimating the sample size when dealing with large populations. This was in order to make sure that there were enough participants to be selected in order to come up with valid and generalizable results.

A stratified random sampling method was used. This enabled the researcher to categorize the population into relevant strata, i.e., job positions or experience, and to randomly select the members of each group. This was to guarantee equitable representation and reduce bias.

Instrument

The main data collection tool was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire included Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions aimed at collecting data from the employees to obtain details about their attitudes to core competence and business sustainability. This instrument was suitable because it enabled a standardized response, hence making data analysis easier. To ensure validity, content validity was used. This confirmed that the questionnaire covered all aspects of core competence and business sustainability used in the study. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used in determining reliability, and a reliability score of 0.7 or above was considered acceptable. This showed that the instrument consistently measured the desired variables.

Procedure

Data was collected by directly administering structured questionnaires to employees and customers of selected hospitality organizations. The gathered data were systematically coded and entered into the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 for analysis.

The analysis was done using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The data were summarized by using simple percentages, tables, and figures as descriptive statistics, and the hypotheses of the study were tested by applying inferential statistics, especially Pearson Correlation analysis. This process enabled one to clearly see the connection between core competence and business sustainability.



RESULT

Out of the 133 structured questionnaires administered to the employees and customers of selected hospitality firms, including hotels, event centers, motel, resort and recreation centers in Wukari metropolis, only 130 were correctly filled and returned to the researcher for use. This number represents an approximate 98% which the researcher found fairly enough to use for the analysis. The remaining 2% of responses were either completed incorrectly or included the selection of more than two options, thereby introducing contradictions to the researcher's intended parameters.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Independent and Dependent Variables

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Operational Knowledge	3.7548	1.28930	130
Team Leadership	3.6129	1.32724	130
Customer Satisfaction	3.5432	1.25167	130
Revenue Growth	3.6785	1.31209	130

Source: SPSS Version 27 Result

The descriptive analysis indicates that the respondents rated operational knowledge as the highest ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.29$), which means that it is considered the strongest core competence in the hospitality industry. The mean values of team leadership ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.33$) and revenue growth ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.31$) were also relatively high, which indicates a moderately high focus on team leadership capability and financial performance. Customer satisfaction was the lowest with the mean score ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 1.25$), which means that customers are quite satisfied, but it can improve, in contrast to other indicators of sustainability. The standard deviations of all variables (between 1.25 and 1.33) represent the moderate level of variability in the perception of the respondents, pointing to the fact that most respondents agreed on the significance of the mentioned factors, but a certain variability in the overall perception of the 130 respondents was observed.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 130)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	73	56.15
	Female	57	43.85
Age (Years)	18–25	18	13.8
	26–30	25	19.2
	31–35	37	28.5
	36 and above	50	38.5
Educational Level	Primary Education	10	7.7
	Secondary Education	25	19.2
	Diploma/NCE	30	23.1
	Bachelor's Degree	40	30.8
	Postgraduate Degree	25	19.2

Source: Field Survey, 2025



The demographic analysis of the 130 respondents reveals that males (56.15) are a little bit higher, compared to females (43.85), but the number of both cases is relatively even. Regarding age, participants are mostly mature and experienced since most participants (67) are aged 31 years and above. Educationally, more than three-quarters of the respondents have Diploma or higher qualification, and half of them have a Bachelor's or Postgraduate degree. It means that the respondents are not only demographically diverse but also experienced and educated enough to give informed answers and increase the validity and reliability of the study results.

H0₁: There is no significant positive relationship between operational knowledge and customer satisfaction in hospitality firms in Wukari metropolis.

Table 3: Correlation Result

		Operational Knowledge	Customer satisfaction
Operational Knowledge	Pearson Correlation	1	.771**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	130	130
Customer satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.771**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	130	130

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). Source: SPSS Result, 2025.

The null hypothesis (H₀₁) states that there is no significant positive relationship between operational knowledge and customer satisfaction in hospitality firms in Wukari metropolis. However, the Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.771$) indicates a strong positive relationship between operational knowledge and customer satisfaction. The p-value (Sig. 2-tailed = 0.000) is less than 0.05, meaning the relationship is statistically significant. Since the correlation is both strong and significant, we reject the null hypothesis (H₀₁) and conclude that operational knowledge has a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction in hospitality firms in Wukari metropolis. This implies that as hospitality firms enhance their operational knowledge, customer satisfaction is likely to improve, emphasizing the importance of well-trained employees and efficient operational processes in delivering high-quality customer experiences.

H0₂: There is no significant positive relationship between team leadership and revenue growth in hospitality firms in Wukari metropolis.

Table 4: Correlation b

		Team leadership	Revenue Growth
Team leadership	Pearson Correlation	1	.645**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	130	130



Revenue Growth	Pearson		
	Correlation	.645**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	130	130

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The null hypothesis (H_{02}) states that there is no significant positive relationship between team leadership and revenue growth in hospitality firms in Wukari metropolis. However, the Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.645$) indicates a moderately strong positive relationship between team leadership and revenue growth. The p-value (Sig. 2-tailed = 0.000) is less than 0.05, meaning the relationship is statistically significant. Since the correlation is both positive and significant, we reject the null hypothesis (H_{02}) and conclude that team leadership has a significant positive impact on revenue growth in hospitality firms in Wukari metropolis. This result suggests that as hospitality firms improve their leadership abilities, they are likely to experience higher revenue growth. This could be due to encouraging workers, improved service quality through motivation, and enhanced customer satisfaction, all of which contribute to increased sales and profitability.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of this study provide empirical evidence that core competences play a crucial role in enhancing business sustainability in the hospitality sector within Wukari metropolis.

The first hypothesis, which states that there is no significant positive correlation between operational knowledge and customer satisfaction, was rejected. The Pearson correlation test showed a strong and significant positive relationship ($r = 0.771$, $p < 0.05$). This means that the increase in operational knowledge, like the level of staff expertise, the efficiency of service delivery, and learning how to control hospitality processes, is directly reflected in customer satisfaction. The observation supports the thesis that customer experiences within the hospitality sector are largely determined by the capacity of the firms to anticipate, meet, and surpass the needs of customers by the efficient application of knowledge. The findings support the work of Teece (2018), who reveals that operational knowledge is a core strategic resource, which allows companies to stand out and establish customer loyalty. This implies that in the case of hospitality firms in Wukari, continuous training, innovation in service delivery, and proper application of operational practices are vital to stay competitive.

Similarly, the second hypothesis (H_{02}), which proposed that there is no significant positive relationship between team leadership and revenue growth, was also rejected. The correlation result showed a moderately strong positive and statistically significant relationship ($r = 0.645$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that leadership capabilities, particularly in motivating employees, coordinating teamwork, and fostering a culture of service excellence, contribute substantially to revenue performance. Effective leadership enhances staff productivity, reduces service errors, and inspires a commitment to customer-oriented behavior, all of which lead to higher sales and profitability. This finding is consistent with leadership and performance theories that emphasize the role of



transformational leadership in driving organizational outcomes (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In the context of Wukari's hospitality firms, it highlights the strategic value of nurturing strong leadership skills among managers to stimulate revenue growth in a highly competitive industry.

Conclusively, these findings suggest that both operational knowledge and team leadership are complementary drivers of sustainability. While operational knowledge ensures service quality and customer satisfaction, leadership effectiveness fosters the human capital conditions necessary to sustain revenue growth. The combined impact of these competences provides a pathway for hospitality firms in Wukari to achieve both short-term profitability and long-term competitiveness.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study revealed that operational knowledge has a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction in hospitality firms in Wukari metropolis, with the strongest correlation coefficient ($r = 0.771$). This implies that enhanced operational knowledge enables hospitality firms to improve their service quality, leading to higher levels of customer satisfaction. Well-trained employees with strong operational knowledge can effectively handle customer needs, resolve service issues efficiently, and maintain high service standards, all of which contribute to an improved customer experience.

Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed that team leadership has a significant positive impact on revenue growth in hospitality firms in Wukari metropolis, with a correlation coefficient of ($r = 0.645$). This implies that hospitality firms that enhance their operational knowledge are more likely to achieve higher revenue growth. Improved operational knowledge enables firms to optimize service efficiency, reduce operational errors, and enhance customer experiences, all of which contribute to increased profitability. Well-trained employees with strong operational knowledge can provide high-quality service, leading to increased customer retention and repeat patronage, which ultimately drives revenue growth.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance customer satisfaction and revenue growth in hospitality firms in Wukari metropolis:

- i. **Invest in Continuous Operational Training and Knowledge Development.** Hospitality firms in Wukari should prioritize structured staff training programs that enhance operational knowledge, including customer service skills, process management, and the use of modern hospitality technologies.
- ii. **Strengthen Leadership Capacity for Revenue Growth.** Hospitality firms should develop leadership competencies among managers and supervisors by organizing leadership workshops, mentorship programs, and motivational training.



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