

Authenticity and Theft in the Hospitality Industry in Bayelsa State, Nigeria

Dinanga Gladys Okolai

Department of management, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island,
Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Email: okolaigladys@gmail.com

Dr. Jasmine O. Tamunosiki-Amadi

Department of management, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island,
Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Email: jassy.tammy@yahoo.com

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between authenticity and theft of employees in the hospitality industry in Bayelsa state, Nigeria. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. The population of the study consists of all hotels registered with Bayelsa State Tourism Development and Hotel Licensing Agency, with an accessible population of 988 employees drawn from 25 three-star hotels in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. A sample of 285 employees was drawn using Taro Yamene's formula, and Bowley's Proportional Allocation Technique was adopted. Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire, the reliability analysis showed strong internal consistency across the scales used. Spearman Ranked Order Correlation Coefficient statistical tool was used to analyse the quantitative data. The results were considered statistically significant, as the p-value was less than .01 level ($p < .001$). Findings revealed a statistically significant relationship between authenticity and theft. Based on the findings, the study concluded that there is a significant relationship between authenticity and theft of hotel employees in the hospitality industry in Bayelsa state. It was recommended that; management provide training focused on authenticity, encourage team leaders to model professional behaviours aimed at setting standards that others can emulate and in addition hotel management should recognise and reward authentic behaviours. This can mitigate deviant work behaviours such as theft in the organisation.

Key words: authenticity, theft, employee, organisation, deviant behaviours

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Employees behaviour significantly impacts organisations' performance and efficiency (Uzondu et al., 2017). However, it is pertinent to note that human behaviour is predisposed by culture, morals, societal norms, and ethics, which explain the reason for different responses by different individuals to similar situations (Cascio, 2013). Piccoli (2013) pointed out that dissatisfied employees have an elevated inclination for negative behaviours because they experience recurrent negative mood states, i.e., an employee could be seen exhibiting harmful behaviours to negatively affect the organisation in a bid to retaliate against unfavourable working conditions believing that such acts would protect their well-being. Searle (2022) opined that these behaviours are remarkable in that they redirect the organisation or employer's focus from attaining goals to solving behavioural problems, which can endanger the organisation's prominence and existence. Scholars have also found that deviant work behaviours reduce

psychological well-being and self-confidence in the work environment, lowering life satisfaction. This can negatively affect health, reducing work attendance and dwindling productivity (Seale, 2022).

Studies have shown that certain kinds of deviant behaviours, such as sabotage, theft, and absenteeism, have led to losses estimated at between \$6 million and \$200 million annually in the US (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Moretti (1986) opined that deviant work behaviours are the primary reasons for up to 305 business failures globally.

Theft is deemed as a harmful business behaviour in the work environment and is regarded as an anomaly that affects businesses globally (Alan et al., 2010). These practices incur direct costs for the organisation to replace stolen or damaged equipment. They can also affect productivity if tasks cannot be completed until the new equipment is received. Research indicates that as many as seventy-five per cent of employees have participated in deviant workplace behaviours, including stealing, resulting in substantial costs. (Harper, 1990).

Employees can have many opportunities, from the opportunity to take a minimal material (such as pen, and paper) to their home, to access the most confidential information, depending on their status and opportunities within the enterprise (Tarkan & Tepeci, 2006). Loss of time caused by lengthy lunches, breaks for personal phone calls, leaving the work area too often for personal reasons, and long conversations are also considered employee theft. Whether for individual or organisational reasons, it seems that the case of an adequately motivated employee stealing has become a common situation. Robinson and Bennett (1995) also suggest that theft is partly related to the work environment and shows that it is the result of cognitive moral development (Korgaonkar, 2021).

Research indicates that businesses may incur annual losses amounting to millions of dollars due to staff theft and sabotage (O'leary-Kelly et al., 1996). Research indicates that 60 per cent of losses are attributable to internal factors, 20 per cent to external factors (customer deviance), and 20 per cent to cash register faults (Tryon & Kleiner, 1997). U.S. businesses have contended with the escalating expenses associated with internal theft for some years. The annual cost in the U.S. was documented to be between \$40 billion to \$400 billion (Oliphant & Oliphant, 2001; Sauser, 2007).

Hopwood et al. (2021) opined that authenticity is the tendency to act on the outside the way one feels on the inside without regard for personal or social penalties. They pointed out that authenticity is a complex construct with internal/psychological and external/behavioural dimensions. Internal aspects include self-awareness, social perception accuracy, and reflection capacity. External behaviour embraces all verbal and non-verbal representations that convey variation in authenticity to others in social situations, emphasising that realness is the connection between the internal and external dimensions. It is a product of psychological maturity and should exhibit well-being, mental health, and mutually satisfying relationships.

Furthermore, Zang et al. (2019) in their study found that individuals who are reminded of their high moral behaviours are reported to be higher in authenticity in the workplace than those with less moral behaviours, adding that the link between high moral behaviours and authenticity remains optimistic despite the position an individual holds in an organisation. Ladkin et al. (2016) revealed that empirical studies of authenticity emphasised the display of primarily upbeat, pro-social behaviours in line with Carl Jung's notion of individuation they proposed. When employees feel they can express their true selves at work, they are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation and a stronger sense of accountability, which can deter deviant workplace behaviours. (Knoll et al., 2021). Recent findings suggest that in environments where personal authenticity is supported, employees demonstrate greater ethical consistency and are less inclined toward dishonest acts like misappropriation of resources (Zhang et al., 2022).

Despite the growing recognition of the relationship between authenticity and theft, there remains a significant gap in the knowledge and empirical research regarding how authenticity affects employee theft in the hospitality industry in Bayelsa State.

1.1 Objective

The aim of the study is to examine the relationship between authenticity and theft among employees in the hospitality industry in Bayelsa State.

1.2 Research Question

The following research question is raised in this study:

1. Is there a relationship between authenticity and theft in the hospitality industry in Bayelsa State, Nigeria?

1.3 Hypothesis

The following hypothesis stated in the full null form is formulated to guide the study

Ho₁ There is no significant relationship between authenticity and theft of hotel employees in the hospitality industry in Bayelsa state, Nigeria.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Authenticity

Authenticity reveals how honest and sincere a person is with people and with him or herself in any given situation. When people present themselves honestly and authentically, others see them accurately (Murphy, 2007). Authenticity is a crucial aspect of projecting presence. Being friendly with only those who can be of benefit in the future or people who have something you want, collecting business cards and phone numbers professionally, establishing many contacts but few real quality friendships and relationships, manipulating others or allowing others to manipulate, behaving in a way of gaining others approval despite how the real feelings, being true to oneself, consciously or unconsciously feeling that others will not accept, respect, love or cooperate because one is acting according to their own needs and priorities makes others perceive the individual as being inauthentic (Ladkin & Taylor, 2010; Leroy, 2015; van den Bosch, 2019).

Dammann et al. (2021) defined authenticity as "the process of having an incongruous relationship with self, others, and relevant social norms." They developed a model of the authenticity of the 4Cs - consistency, conformity, connection, and continuity. This model is a continuum of Lehman et al. (2019) model of - 3C consistency, conformity and connection. The researchers have also proposed that continuity is a process that captures the developmental process of authenticity because individuals continuously work on themselves to continue to remain authentic. They further stated that the authenticity process does not begin at birth because of the intellectual condition of an individual to evaluate oneself.

Authenticity has been positively linked to employee well-being. A meta-analysis by Sutton (2020) found that authenticity significantly correlates with enhanced well-being and engagement across diverse populations. Employees who can be authentic at work experience lower stress levels and higher job satisfaction (Mehta, 2021). Conversely, environments that suppress authenticity can lead to emotional dissonance and burnout, negatively impacting mental health

Authentic behaviour fosters trust and positive relationships among coworkers. Employees who exhibit authenticity are more likely to be perceived as trustworthy and approachable, facilitating open communication and collaboration (Tang et al., 2023). This openness can lead to stronger team cohesion and a more inclusive workplace culture. Moreover, perceiving an

interaction partner as authentic promotes relationship initiation through shared reality, enhancing interpersonal connections (Sciara & Finkel, 2024).

Despite its benefits, maintaining authenticity in the workplace can be challenging. Factors such as perceived organisational politics or unsupportive management can inhibit employees from expressing their true selves (Tang et al., 2023). Additionally, employees may fear negative repercussions if their authentic selves do not align with organisational norms or expectations.

2.2 Theft

One of the most common definitions of employee theft is “the unauthorised taking, control, or transfer of money and property belonging to the formal work organisation that an employee perpetrates during occupational activity” (Hollinger & Clark, 1983). Greenberg (1997) defines employee theft as “the unauthorised and without permission appropriation of company property by employees to own or sell to someone else”. Klotz and Buckley (2013) pointed out that any illegal removal of the organisational assets and subsequent personal transfer is considered theft. Existing literature has identified some reasons for employee theft in the workplace. Employee theft often results from an interaction of personal and organisational factors (Greenberg & Barling, 1999). Personality characteristics, dissatisfaction, low employee morale, lack of work ethic, low pay, lack of organisational commitment, and flaws in the control system influence employees’ intentions to steal (Bailey, 2006; Kulas et al., 2007; Niehoff & Paul, 2000). In addition, external factors such as economic downturn, labour market deterrence, and regional crime rate influence theft behaviour (Rickman & Witt, 2007; Stevens, 2011). Among these motivations, opportunity is considered one of the primary motivations for theft behaviour, with a near-zero probability of being caught (Barrett, 1971). However, it is the most controllable precondition of internal theft (Tersine & Russell, 1981). Businesses need to evaluate their human-related actions to prevent theft. The cost of theft in an organisation as a type of property deviance can be as high as that of sabotage.

The hospitality industry presents scenarios that may lead to potential abuse of both employees and customers (Stevens, 2001). Extensive cash transactions create numerous opportunities for theft, rendering the industry more vulnerable to dishonest practices (Beck, 1992). The high turnover rate and reliance on part-time employees in the hospitality industry highlight significant ethical concerns (Stevens, 2001). Employee theft in the hospitality industry may encompass routine actions, including the theft of cash, equipment, inventory, misuse of facilities, and violations of discount and coupon policies (Krippel et al., 2008).

2.3 Authenticity and Theft

Zhang et al. (2019) studied the authentic moral self: dynamic interplay between perceived authenticity and moral behaviours in the workplace. The study reinforced the relationship between authenticity and moral behaviours in work-specific contexts. The study established that the relationship between authenticity and morality was observed both between and within individuals in China. The findings demonstrate a bidirectional relationship between moral behaviours and authenticity in the workplace.

Ghufran Ali Khan et al. (2022) executed a confirmatory empirical study on the topic “Does authentic leadership influence the performance of individuals in the presence of trust and leader-member exchange: evidence from health care sector in Rawalpindi and Islamabad of Pakistan. The outcome confirmed the significant and positive effect of authentic leadership with individual performance connected both directly and indirectly through the mediating effect of trust and leader management exchange.

Mehta, P. (2021) examined the role of authenticity in employee well-being, particularly in emotional work settings. The study determined that emotional work influences the authenticity of an employee, which further impacts employee well-being. The study suggests that

promoting authenticity in the workplace can enhance employee well-being and reduce emotional dissonance, which may, in turn, decrease deviant behaviours like theft. By creating environments that support authentic expression, organisations can foster ethical behaviour and reduce the likelihood of misconduct among employees.

Nguyen, P., and Truong, G. (2021) studied employee theft in five-star hotels in Vietnam, utilizing theories such as the Theory of planned behaviour, equity theory and Reinforcement theory. Through 312 questionnaire responses and nine in-dept interviews, the study identified factors like personal characteristics, opportunities, unfair compensation, injustice, and unethical working environments as significant contributors to theft behaviour. The study underscores the role of individual authenticity in ethical decision making within the hospitality industry. It suggests that employees who perceive a misalignment between their values and the organisational environment may be more inclined to engage in theft. The study highlights the importance of fostering authentic work environments to reduce unethical behaviour among employees.

Yekini, et al., (2018) investigated workplace fraud and theft in Nigerian SMEs, particularly in the mobile telephone sector. The study identified personal and organisational factors contributing to employee theft, emphasising the need for authentic behaviour and ethical practices to mitigate such issues. The study highlights that employees who perceive a disconnect between their personal values and the organisational culture may be more prone to engage in fraudulent activities. By fostering authenticity and aligning organisational practices with ethical standards, SMEs can reduce the incidence of workplace theft and enhance overall organisational integrity.

Nawawi, A. and Salin, A. S. (2018) explored employee fraud and misconduct in a Malaysian telecommunication company. The study found that despite having adequate policies, weak compliance and ethical lapses among employees lead to fraud. The research emphasises the importance of individual authenticity and ethical standards in preventing workplace misconduct. The findings suggest that employees who lack authenticity in their roles may be more susceptible to engaging in fraudulent activities.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. The variables for the study were measured using scales that were adapted from literature. The population of the study consists of all hotels registered with Bayelsa State Tourism Development and Hotel Licensing Agency in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, with an accessible population of 988 employees drawn from 25 three-star hotels in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. A sample of 285 employees was drawn using Taro Yamene's formula, and Bowley's Proportional Allocation Technique was adopted. Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire titled authenticity and theft, the reliability analysis showed strong internal consistency across the scales used. Spearman Ranked Order Correlation Coefficient statistical tool was used to analyse the quantitative data. The results were considered statistically significant, as the p-value was less than .01 level ($p < .001$). The results for the tests are presented in the subsequent sections.

4.0 RESULTS

he result for the test of the hypothesis is also found in the table below.

H₀₁. There is no significant relationship between authenticity and theft of hotel employees in the hospitality industry in Bayelsa state, Nigeria.

Table 4.1 Correlation Outcome of the relationship between Authenticity and Theft

		Authenticity	Theft
Authenticity	Pearson Cor.	1	-.793**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	220	220
Theft	Pearson Cor.	-.793**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	1	-.793**

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Source: Survey Data, 2024

Table 4.1 presents the correlation between authenticity and theft. As indicated in the table, the correlation is $r = -.793$, indicating a very strong inverse relationship between the variables, which is significant at $p = .000 < .01$. This implies that there is a significant relationship between authenticity and theft of hotel employees in the hospitality industry in Bayelsa state, Nigeria. The null hypothesis is thus rejected, and the alternate hypothesis is accepted.

5.0 DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Discussions

The results revealed that there is a significant inverse relationship between authenticity and theft. The implication is that any improvement in authenticity among hospitality employees will significantly reduce theft. These findings corroborate the results of earlier researchers. According to Goleman and Boyatzis (2023), authenticity refers to an individual's capacity to engage with others genuinely, transparently, and consistently. Employees who demonstrate a high level of authenticity are shown to have a greater likelihood of establishing trust, upholding high ethical standards, and engaging in positive workplace behaviours, reducing their likelihood of engaging in workplace misconduct. Specifically, authenticity refers to honesty, sincerity, and consistency in one's acts and words. This characteristic contributes to developing trust and respect within working interactions. According to Singh and Garcia (2023), authenticity has a significant role in moulding employee interactions and decreasing behaviours that could be detrimental to the business in the hospitality industry, which places a tremendous emphasis on the importance of teamwork and the satisfaction of guests.

Additionally, authenticity has a significant impact on the reduction of theft in the workplace. According to Johnson et al. (2023), employees who value authenticity highly are more likely to adhere to ethical norms and avoid engaging in actions that directly oppose their moral views. These individuals are honest about their conduct, which lessens the likelihood that they would engage in dishonest behaviours such as theft. Genuine employees are also aware of the ramifications of theft, not just for the organisation but also for their integrity and the trust they have established with their coworkers. According to Singh and Garcia (2023), employees who demonstrate high levels of authenticity have a considerably lower risk of engaging in theft. This is because they are more likely to be honest.

Similarly, hotel managers should consider authenticity a significant trait during the hiring process. This is because employees who display this trait are less prone to engage in deviant work behaviour. According to Parker et al. (2023), management can eliminate negative behaviours and cultivate a work environment built on trust, openness, and responsibility if they promote a culture of authenticity inside the organisation.

In addition, management should urge leaders to demonstrate authenticity in their interactions with employees since this can impact workers' conduct. It has been demonstrated that authentic leadership encourages ethical behaviour among employees, reducing workplace misconduct and improving the culture of the business as a whole (Johnson et al., 2023).

In conclusion, the sizeable inverse link between authenticity and theft sheds light on authenticity's significant role in moulding positive employee behaviours. One of the factors that leads to a healthier and more productive work environment in the hotel business is the presence of genuine, honest, and consistent employees. These employees are less likely to indulge in theft. These findings highlight the significance of cultivating authenticity through training, recruitment, and leadership development to reduce the impact of deviant work behaviour and improve the success of organisations.

5.2 Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendation was made:

Management of hotels should train employees to be authentic by focusing on integrity, consistency and accountability to enhance their authenticity perceptions, recognise and reward authentic behaviours and make room for ethical training that emphasises authenticity to reduce theft in the organisation.

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