

Improving the quality of tour guiding



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Abstract:

Service organizations are striving to increase the quality of the services they offer. They are also using a wide variety of people management techniques. These two activities can sometimes come into conflict. This article examines a variety of management practices, particularly from human resource management (HRM),

1. 0 Introduction**1. 1 Introduction and Background**

Service quality has been broadly and firmly recognised in the tourism industry over the past decades to be the critical factor in achieving tourist satisfaction (Ap & Wong 2001; Zhang & Chow 2004). Tour guides are frontline employees in tourism industry whom provide assistance, information and cultural, historical and contemporary heritage interpretation for tourists. They also play an important role to deliver a quality service and experience, not only for business success but also critical to both in shaping tourists' experience, the overall image of the destination they represent (Huang, Hsu & Chan, 2010).

Tourism is recognised as the most fast growing industry and has the ability to generate the most income and jobs when compared to all the other industries, in particular for those countries without too much natural resources for developing a sustainable primary and/or secondary industries. The tourist industry is also a rapid changing one in nature and structure, researcher has indicated the change is driven by tourists (Grabowski and Wang 2001). It is also believed that service performance relates closely to

service quality. Tourist satisfaction is often based on the service quality tourists' received (Lee, Graefe & Burns, 2004).

For tour guides being the front-line service providers, tourists will then place their judgement on their level of satisfaction on what the tour guides have delivered. On the other hand, it is crucial for tour guides to understand what tourists are expecting and by providing what services will increase their level of satisfaction; therefore training is essential to tour guides to become part of quality assurance mechanism (Grabowski and Wang 2001).

Previous researches have been mentioning how important is to assure the quality of tour guides (McGrath, 2007). Other study has discussed on a growing insight and understanding of the service quality aspect of tour guides (Heung, 2008) but not examining methods on how to assure and manage the quality. Indeed for countries that make wide use of tour guides and “where the guide can be bound to foster sustainable tourism”, tour guiding quality assurance should really be focused on (Wong 2001 and Huang & Weiler, 2010).

However, monitoring and controlling of the service quality of the tour guides has become very difficult. There are a number of reported incidents of rows and conflicts between tourists and the clienteles. Such reflects an alarming signal on the possible degrade of the professional ethics of tour guides while the industry has been pilloried for its poor service to tourists. As suggested by Schuler and Jackson (1987), application of appropriate Human resource practices could result in changing tour guide's role behaviours and leading to the success of a quality service delivery.

Hitherto, literature has a wide coverage on human resource management (HRM) on the hotel industry and has identified the issues faced, measured the effects of HRM (Alleyne, Doherty and Greenidge 2006) and current practice of the HRM is analysed (Cetinel, Yolal and Emeksiz 2009). It is believed that the determinants of service quality in the hotel industry are considered in relation to HRM (Worsfold 1999). Tsaur and Lin (2004) have also discussed the role of HRM practices and service behaviours in promoting the service quality in hotel industries.

Unlike the fertile and wide literature coverage on practising HRM in hotel industry, there are not too much focused literature review on how tourist industry could make use of the best human resource practices to boost up its tour guides' service quality which is beyond doubt an increasing challenge to the tourist industry yet to be managed. In considering the close similarity of hotel industry and tourist industry by nature of their operating environs, the researcher considers that it would be conducive to make reference to the proven HRM practices in hotel industry for boosting up the service quality of tour guides.

1. 2 Aims and Objectives

The aim of this literature review is to critically analysis the human resource management practices to improve the service quality of tour guides in the tourism industry and to identify any gaps for future research.

Since the linkage between employee behaviors and the delivery of quality services has been well discussed in the services marketing and hospitality literature (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000; Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996) but not

in tourism literature, the review will perform two main functions. First involves exploring the literature on service quality and to identify service gaps. The second will be implementing appropriate HRM practice to tour guides to minimize service gaps and to improve their service quality.

1. 3 Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations of the Study

First, different countries have diverse tourism regulations and statutory control. It is difficult to apply a standard model of human resource practices to the world tourism industry. Different setting in government and tourism council structures necessitates careful consideration. The study is therefore limit to a general human resource management on improving tour guide's service quality whereas any lessons learned in one destination in terms of implementation of practices may not be fully applicable in the other destination(s). Taking minimum wage and maximum working hours as an example, Hong Kong has just enacted the minimum wage ordinance with implementation date on 1. 5. 2011 without concurrently cover the maximum working hours. This largely differs from other developed democratic countries.

A second consideration is the possible cultural difference in different destinations. Tour guides in this study are indeed the key stakeholders. The level of general attitude and response towards situations could have direct bearings on the human resource management systems. Having said it, it is extremely difficult, if not totally impossible, to substantiate the direct relevancy of different culture within a particular setting of human resource practice. In the light of this, this study did not probe into cultural factor.

Delimitation of the Study

As to delimitate the above boundaries, an assumption on no cultural change and regulatory controls in the tourist industry environment was made.

Accordingly, it is worth to replicate this research work in the future.

2. 0 Review of Relevant Literature

2. 1 Roles of Tour Guides and Their Impact on Tourism Industry

A tour guide is a person who guides visitors in his choice of language in order to point out places of attraction to tourists from or abroad his home country (Sanyal, 2011). They play a multifaceted role in tourism. A guided tour helps to provide quality and safe experience which involves a guide, tourists and the environment. This objective is fulfilled when all of them interact at the same space at the same point of time (Belgradetours. com, 2010). They serve four major functions – instrumental, communicative, social and interactionary. An efficient tour guide is one who strikes the right balance and performs all the above mentioned four functions so that the tourists are extremely satisfied with the services provided (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006).

From the destination's perspective, tour guides act as an interpreter to translate the culture and value of the destination (Ryan and Dewar, 1995).

As from the tourist's perspective, the development of technology has made them resort to a lot of guide books and the internet to know more about a destination. Most of them refer to these guide books and do not think of shelling out some extra pennies to hire a tour guide. However, tour guides are still very necessary as they can make a trip extremely special by providing tourists a lot of important information about a destination.

Moreover most of this information may not be available in any guide books

or on the internet. A guide may help tourists to explore some new place of attraction which may not be mentioned in the travel guide (Travellers Destination Guide, 2011). One of the most important functions a tour guide performs is that he or she helps one to plan a trip. Just reading some guides may lead tourists to miss certain tourist spots which may be attracting the attention. Yet, most internet materials promote only places which are well known. If a person wants to visit lesser known places then the best choice will be that of a tour guide. A tour guide has thorough knowledge about the destination. Most of them are locals of that particular area and hence have toured that area thereby knowing very small intricacies which most tourists may not know about.

Well qualified and knowledgeable tour guides can make the guided tour extremely intriguing by providing relevant, organized and entertaining heritage knowledge to tourists. They provide details about the destination which includes its history, artwork, monument, culture and attractions to the tourists and help the tourists to have a memorable holiday experience (sanfranshuttletours. com, 2008). A tourist guide can educate and narrate local folklores, history and culture of a certain destination or a certain monument or a place of attraction. Moreover, they are the best people who can direct as to what is the best item to shop from and where the shops are available. They can even take the tourists to preferable eateries which provide traditional food of the destination (amazines. com, 2011).

Tour guides play an important role in transferring cultural understanding. It is the responsibility of a tour guide to select an itinerary depending on the choices given by the tourists. A tourist may want to visit only national parks

or religious places or may be a blend of all sorts of attractions ranging from historical monuments to scenic places. However, the tour guide needs to short list which places would be toured and accordingly the trip is planned. The guide provides and interprets the information about all the possible attractions which are being shown to the tourists. It is also the role of the tour guide to manage time effectively so that a number of attractions are showed within a limited period of time. This also requires to carefully assessing as to how much time should be spared to each attraction (McDonnell, 2001).

Tour guides play a very important role in educating and parting knowledge to the tourists, and they are a critical link between a country, its guests and their experiences. It is also a source of information and informal education and can greatly contribute to a destinations' image. . An efficient tour guide will always find more tourists as the fame of the guide will reach by word of mouth. Hence, they are an important part of the travel and tourism industry

2. 2 Service quality in tour guiding

Satisfaction of tourists is conceptualised to include three aspects or layers, namely satisfaction with the services provided by a tour guide, the tourist must be satisfied with the tour services provided and the overall experience of the tour must be a favourable one. Quality of services provided by tour guides has a direct effect on satisfaction of tourists with guiding services and an indirect effect on satisfaction attained from tour services and overall tour experiences provided (Huang, Hsu & Chan, 2010).

The quality of service provided by a tour guide is of considerable significance to the tourist. Most tourists have a favourable tour experience if the tour guide provides excellent service quality by touring through the most coveted points of attraction (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Also it is the responsibility and the job of the tour guide to give a blend of different points of attractions so that the tourists are not bored by their experience of touring out.

In regards of tour guiding, three major concepts would help in assessing the perceived service quality of tour guide, which are (i) core services delivery, (ii) customer orientation and (iii) communication effectiveness respectively (Heung, 2008).

For core service delivery, tour guide must be rich in knowledge content. The more the amount of information provided by the tour guide, the higher is the quality of service provided as most tourists rate their tour to be favourable if they gain a lot of knowledge about the destination through a tour guide. The tour guide must be able to provide information about the cultural and rich heritage of a particular destination and must be aware of the policies and practises that are followed by a certain country, state or region so as to enlighten the tourists about these aspects.

A tour guide needs to provide quality service and helps in easing the extra efforts of the tourists by obtaining the tickets and making reservations. They also check on the operating hours of a certain tourist spot and will help if the tourist experiences any kind of problem during the trip. Overall tourist logistics are handled by a tour guide and this helps the tourists to attain the rest and relaxation and an overall hassle free trip. Hence the service quality

provided in this matter is extremely important for the tourist to have a memorable trip (Independent Traveler. com, 2011).

One of the main attributes that a tour guide must have expertise in is to effectively organize and handle tourist groups. This needs them to coordinate with various vendors and suppliers of goods and services in order to make the overall tourism experience favourable. Moreover they must be adept at dealing with all kinds of people. They mostly mingle with both local people and with foreigners. A tourist group consists of heterogeneous people and a tourist guide needs to tackle all of them including irate tourists. Time management is also an important factor which helps to determine service quality. The tour guide must effectively see to it that all the tourists adhere to the instructions given by the tour guide.

As for customer orientation, it is essential to denote the extent the guide puts tourists' needs and interests ahead of themselves in providing superior value to tourists (Heung 2008). They need to take tourists to proper shops so that they may be able to purchase items which are locally popular. These may range from an assortment of food items to dress material and antiques. The tour guide must be able to identify the right shops which sell wares which are famous for the particular destination. For example, a tourist visiting an island destination may like to purchase some antiques made of sea shells or conch etc (Scribd. com, 2003). Moreover, tour guides should not focus on short-term self-interest and should not adopt a hard selling approach (Heung 2008).

Effective communication is a significant aspect for tourists to assess the service quality of tour guide (Ap & Wong 2001). The tour guide must be fluent in the local language of the country as well as foreign languages so that the tourists can be explicitly explained about the points of attraction regarding a destination. Language barrier is a very serious factor which can hinder the service quality provided by tour guides (luxury – vogue. com, 2010).

Although previous studies have identified different attributes on service quality (Zhang and Chow 2004) and have discussed the service quality aspect of tour guides (Wong 2001; Heung 2008), the studies are however taken in the tourists' point of view but not on managerial perspective.

To conclude, a tour guide must have the ability to successfully communicate, interpret, handle emergency situations by solving problems and be polite so as to make the trip a memorable one. They must be friendly with the tourists and at the same time make them aware that it is the duty of the tourist to keep the place clean and not to litter around (Liao, Chen, Chang & Tseng, 2011).

2. 3 The service gap

A tour guide is expected to provide diverse services so that the tour is a favourable one. All in all, the tourists expects a hassle free relaxed trip as all the travel logistics are supposed to be handled by the person who is responsible for the guided tour. It is the tour guide incumbent responsibility to coordinate with local vendors and other miscellaneous service agent to

ensure that the tourist does not run into any problems in an alien destination.

Parasuraman et al. (1985) has identified the concept of service quality gap between tourists' perceptions and their expectations. It has been often observed that there is a huge gap between the service provided by a tour guide and the satisfaction attained from the service by the tourist. When quality gaps occurred, it represents quality losses (Zeithaml et al. 1990).

Sometimes the tour itineraries may promise something which is impossible to attain and this puts the tour guide in a difficult position. However one of the main challenges of a tour guide is to meet the tourists' expectations with limited resources and support provided by the Travel Company or agency responsible for taking the overall responsibility of the tour. Another challenge faced by tour guides is the language barrier and lack of communication skills which lead the customer to be dissatisfied (Prideaux, Moscardo & Laws, 2006).

Some of the critical issues which result in a service gap have been classified into six main categories such as immaturity of a particular tourist market, unhealthy business practises followed by travel agencies, issues related to human resources, exploitative policies of inbound tour operators, role conflict and mechanism followed to provide service quality (Sciencedirect. com, 2011).

One of the main reasons for a service gap between the services provided and the level of satisfaction attained is the fact that most travellers have different expectations which depends on the purpose of the trip. The reason

for this gap is there is a lack of understanding in what tourists' expect (Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons 2008). Take the case of a beach destination – youths may like to go to the beach and have fun whereas elderly people would like to relax and would avoid indulging in loud beach parties. Depending on the kind of people the tour guide has to provide the exact blend of services which satisfies them (Chinese tourists blog, 2010).

Most tourists deem a trip to be a memorable one if the services provided during shopping were excellent. Some of the areas which need improvement by tour guides are providing information, concerns about the tourists' needs and abilities especially with regards to language barriers and the helpful attitude (Reisinger & Waryszak, 1994).

Low service quality perception will lead to a service gap to an extent of lack of key performance indicators which helps to monitor the performance of a tour guide (Zeithaml et al. 1990; smartdatacollective. com, 2010). Surveys should be conducted and proper resources must be allocated to tour guides to perform their professionalism.

All in all, the tour guide must put in a considerable effort so that the customer has a satisfied trip. Other than this, the travel service providers and other miscellaneous vendors involved should cooperate and coordinate effectively with the tour guides so that they provide a complete travel package to the tourists thereby attaining optimum satisfaction and reducing the service gap between the expectation of the tourists' and the services provided by the tour guides.

2. 4 Implementation of HRM to improve service quality on tour guiding

In the tourism industry, success is largely dependent on customer satisfaction, and much of the customer's experience is dependent on tour guide's behaviours (Jolliffe & Farnsworth 2003). As mentioned above, service quality has a direct effect on customer satisfaction (Huang, Hsu & Chan, 2010). Schuler and Jackson (1987) described the appropriate HR practices will result in tour guide's role behaviours and linked to the success of delivering a quality service.

HRM consists of a range of “ practices, pning the acquisition of employees, employee development and employee retention” (Stone & Meltz, 1993) and is gradually recognized as a key to sustainable advantage (Pfeffer, 1994).

HRM can be viewed as connotation which allows grouping together a series of sub – disciplines which are wholly concerned with the management of the workforce, such as industrial and labour relations, employee relations, organizational behaviour and personnel management. One of the main responsibilities of HRM is to provide for a range of people practises which can be integrated to direct a professional approach to employee management. Another important function of Human Resource is to provide for a competitive advantage over rivals by providing training and other people management skills so as to enhance the quality of the services provided to tourists. Also the activities conducted by the HRM should be fully integrated with the external environment demands.

The significance of hospitality and tourism employment in both developing and developed countries is recognised by World Travel and Tourism Council

(WTTC). According to this international body, tourism and travel related activities constitutes for about 8. 7% of jobs or 230 million jobs worldwide. However, there is rising concern over the quality of services provided by this industry. Hence there is an increasing need for a proper human resource channel to act and improve upon the quality of jobs and services provided. Riley (1996) reaffirmed that the need for effective human resource to impart training to tour guides so that the quality of services provided by them to the tourists is improved.

Previous research has advocated in which identifying errors is one of the responses to quality service (Fache, 2000). The following discuss the critical aspects which are responsible for enhancing service quality and tackle contemporary and known challenges by implementing effective Human Resource Management to tour guides.

Workforce Planning

One of the critical dimensions for tourism to be successful is its work force. Workforce management is not a new phenomenon. However its importance has been recently recognized particularly in the fields of managerial implications and impacts in tourism in developing countries. One of the critical point of concern is the ambiguity of the work functions and work environments of tour guides and representatives of tour operators. There is an increasing need for human resource managers to effectively strategize and implement the role and functions of a tour guide to provide quality services to potential tourists. Nowadays with new breakthroughs in technology and science, in many parts the role of tour guides is being replaced by flexible and electronic alterations at tourism sites, such as

robots that have been programmed to converse in diverse languages thereby imparting knowledge to potential tourists on site environment and historical and current events related to the site (Baum, 2006).

Recently, an experiment was conducted by using a robot to act as a tour guide in the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. The robot named Minerva, successfully operated for 2 weeks and during the monitored 94 hours of operation provided 620 guided tours visiting about 6228 exhibits in the museum. The introduction of robots to act as tour guides is a challenge and hence there is an immense and urgent need for human resource interaction and implementation of proper training to tour guides in order to enhance performance expectations. However, one must also keep in mind that robots cannot act as tour guides in all tourism sites. Moreover the user friendly information and interaction which a human being can provide cannot be delivered by a robot (Thrun et. al, 2000).

Recruitment

Human Resource Management plays an important part in recruiting and training potential tour guides so that they provide knowledge and information to potential tourists. The tour guides is one of the main determinants of a successful tour experience and hence the quality of service provided is of extreme significance. The starting point for delivering a quality service is that there must be a quality tour guide to produce and deliver the service (Redman & Matthews 1998) and it is important to select tour guide with the right attitude and behaviour and induct them into a quality culture.

The core competencies needed to be inspected during recruitment are knowledge, guest service orientation, personal and professional style and communication skills (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000). When potential tour guides are identified, human resource should also be conscientious on the screening process to pick the most suitable candidates (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000).

Human resource must ensure that the tour guide has diverse knowledge related to the village, state, city or country through which the person conducts a guided tour. This means the tour guide must have knowledge of the history of the place. He or she must know about the culture, climate, geography, economic conditions, ethnic groups, food, well known tourist attractions, flora and fauna and birds.

Also the tour guide must be fluent in conversing with the local language prevalent in the region and the language in which he or she has to deliver his or her speech or oration regarding the tour to potential tourists. The human resource must consider this as one of the main attributes while recruiting a tour guide. The tour guide must have clarity of speech and thought. A tour guide who provides ambiguous information to tourists can result in irking the tourists. Moreover the tour guide must not speak softly and poorly. This will result in a language barrier between the tourist and the tour guide.]

Another important aspect which human resource personnel should ensure is that the tour guide is an effective communicator and interpreter. The tour guide must successfully interpret the cultural and physical landscape for their clients. Effective usage of techniques of interpretation helps in bridging

the gap between cultural differences that may exist between the host and the tourist. (Yu, Weiler & Ham, 2002).

It is important for human resource to recruit the most appropriate tour guides for the job to further enhance the quality of service they delivered by the following sections.

Induction, Orientation and On-boarding

The human resource team is responsible for providing proper induction, orientation and on the job training to newly recruited tour guides. Tour guides must be provided with specific details on organizing and conducting a tour successfully. The tour guides must know that tourists expect their tours to be entertaining, enjoyable, safe and educational. Also the tourists expect good quality comfortable accommodations and varied food which may satiate the gourmet. Other than these, the tour guides must fit into their plan some time for shopping, meeting some local people and photography. It is very important that human resource consistently works to providing training and refresher courses to tour guides. This is very important as a tour guide must be aware of the general and current affairs of the region where he or she conducts guided tours. Therefore it is very important that the guide keeps on studying and imparts historical as well as current information related to the place to potential tourists. Refresher courses must be provided on bus check, no smoking on the bus, seating order, embossing and debussing, free days for the visitor to pursue leisure activities, tour guides' discussion of specific topics and so on. This is necessary as tour guides should not provide wrong information due to their ignorance. Hence the human resource personnel must also attach a lot of importance to provide on

board training to tour guides. (Noam, 1999).

Human Resource also must provide extra attention to the role of tour guides in intercultural settings. It has been observed that there is a cultural gap between the visitor and the visited. Tourists join guided tours for diverse reasons; however there is a wish to acquire rewarding and new intercultural experiences and also to avoid language barriers in an alien country or a region. One of the main determinants is the performance of a tour guide especially in such intercultural environments. The guide influences the places tourists' visits and the interaction made with the host culture. Almost all tourists rely on the tour guide for language translation and striking the perfect balance between immersion and cultural buffering. The tour guide should act as a successful mediator between social settings and host communities. An effective tour guide is one who uses a lot of comparisons and examples to interpret the foreign world in terms of things which establishes familiarity between the visitor and tries to minimise the effects due to unfamiliarity by emphasising on possible connections. Hence the tour guide plays an important role in imparting potential tourism related information and knowledge to visitors.

Human resource should let tour guides realize all the basic aspects and basic requirements for their job, for example the importance of punctuality, informing visitors of safety regulations and politeness (Zhang and Chow 2004), while tour guides needed to pay attention in the above aspects to maintain and keep up the good service standards.

Skills Management

A tourism industry in an area is successful if the tour guides in that particular area have the skills to provide an enriching tourism experience to the potential client. They act as the front line staffs that are responsible to provide authentic information to tourists. A tour guide must have good communication and interpersonal skills. They are the ones who sell a tour package and are wholly responsible for ensuing satisfaction to tourists. A good tour guide must have the skill to effectively act as a buffer among the tourists, arranging transportation, social environment, problem solving and interpretation tactics, insulating travellers from difficulties thereby establishing a safe haven for tourists. It is because tour guides act as intermediaries between the unknown environment and tourists.

The human resource personnel should apply an importance – performance-based model which stresses the need for tour guides to have proper skills to enhance their level or performance which will ultimately result in producing exemplary services to tourists. The importance – performance model is very effective tool which helps to judge the importance and performance attributes (Zhang & Chow, 2004).

Researches have pointed the problems in which tour guides failed in meeting tourists' expectations to provide sufficient assistance and advice for solving their problems. Tour guides are the people who are responsible to tackle and solve emerging problems during the tours and tourists have complained that tour guides are not enthusiastic in giving help, or the guides did not have the ability to solve the problems that emerged (Zhang & Chow, 2004).

Therefore human resource should be able to manage the below mentioned skills to enhance the efficiency and quality of tour guides:

a) He or she must have the skills to act as a leader

b) Must impart knowledge to tourists

c) Must act as an ambassador who presents the destination in such a way that the tourist is tempted to revisit the place

d) Must act as a perfect host by creating a comfortable environment

e) Must act as a facilitator of various services by knowing when and how to fulfil the above four roles and

f) Must show confidence on problem solving.

Training and Development

The human resource team plays an important part in developing effective tour guides. Human resources must provide trainings for tour guides to develop them being customer-orientated and focus on delivering quality to ensure service performance (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000). Previous literature has discussed human resource training can increase employees' job-related knowledge, skills and abilities and result in higher performance (Bartel 1994) and consistency on quality standards (Zhang, Cai and Liu 2002).

One of the main attributes that a tour guide must have is that of education and proficiency of language. They must have adequate knowledge about the place or region in which they provide guided tours. This includes knowing about the local culture and traditions of that place, tourist attractions, food,

shopping, problem solving and decision making tactics, helping tourists in times of difficulty and arranging the entire logistics of travel which includes transportation like arranging tickets, entry passes etc., providing decent accommodation etc. Human resource must train tour guides to act as professionals and deliver impeccable service to tourists by meeting the above criteria. Language training is another important aspect which helps a tour guide to be confident of the language he or she converses with the visitor. Also training and developmental programs should be conducted from time to time so that guides develop good product knowledge, positive attitude with respect to service, help, willingness, empathy, veneration etc. and good communication and interpretation skills which also includes language proficiency. (Ap & Wong, 2001). Human resource personnel also should provide training to tour guides about the conservation and ecological principles so that they can effectively support sustainable tourism in an area.

The third aspect which must be effectively covered by the human resource team is that tourists may prefer different kinds of tour guides who may act as mentors, pathfinders or the official tour guide. The training must be a bit different provided to such tour guides so that they can meet the expectations of tourists. (London College of Communication, 2011). Many tourists would like to explore a region and would like the idea to visit far flung areas which are not visited by most people. For such kinds, the training provided needs to be a bit different from the usual training provided to tourists. Moreover, tour guides who cater particular kind of tourist destination like coastal tourism or adventure tourism needs to be trained on differently.

In most countries the tour operators are stressing on developing high quality tours which caters to provide excellent services to tourists to have an enjoyable tour. An integral part of this is to provide adequate training to tour guides so that they are able to match the expectations of potential tourists (Black & King, 2002). There are niche tourists who may offer the price to avail luxury services be it accommodation and the assorted products outlining the same. One of them is tailor made package which also includes exclusive guide service. For this specific crowd it is very necessary for travel agents to provide flawless service so that the customer chooses to book the next tour through the same operator.

Tour guides should have some attributes which a leader must have. First of all, the guide must have expert knowledge so that he or she can lead by the power of expertise. Moreover, the person must win and sustain the trust of the small group he takes care of when on travel. A tour guide is one who readily answers to the queries put forth by the small group of people he or she has to mentor and guide. (productiveflourishing. com, 2010).

Human resource personnel should ensure that the problems faced by tour guides are resolved. Many times they may get involved in a conflicting role and it is the duty of the human resource team to intervene and resolve conflicts. At times, these people may find it challenging to satisfy the group of tourists with the limited resources available. The human resource team should conduct training programs which makes them adept to handling such untoward situations. The job of a tour guide entails handling varied persons and one may need to be commanding at times. These kinds of attributes

need to be developed so that one may find it easy to handle a group of foreigners in a city or region.

Hence, the human resource must see to it that guides are properly groomed and trained and can meet up every expectations ranging from problem solving skills, to establishing two way communication process to friendly behaviour. The human resource personnel should provide time to time training which may help these guides to be updated with the latest information. The tourism industry is volatile and a slightest change affects the same. Hence, these people must develop a progressive and competitive attitude to provide the best services to tourists.

Some tour guides regard training as a waste of time instead of an opportunity to advance their quality and career (Zhang, Cai and Liu 2002). The human resource on its part must ensure that such guides attain job satisfaction and should motivate and encourage them to perform better enable provide the tourists the best holiday experience.

Personnel Administration

Personnel administration should be capable to handle workplace issues such as harassment, discrimination and violence. It is important for the personnel department to work within the law in which the department needs to fully understand laws related to the workplace. Further it needs to follow the right procedures and actions to deal with any upcoming issues. A workplace climate is a fundamental issue in supporting tour guide's work and service quality and in turn is proposed to be reflected in customer experiences (Schneider, White and Paul 1998).

Salary and Compensation in Wage

The human resource management should effectively implement minimum standards of wages and hours of working to tour guides. Besides, scholars have proposed a potential relationship between the fair treatment of tour guides and excellence in service delivery (Bettencourt and Brown 1997). The department also needs to ensure the tour guide's working conditions and problems on minimum wage and overtime work and always keep thorough record of all tour guides. They must not be low paid so that they provide good quality services to tourists.

Previous research has identified the problem in which the basic salary of tour guides is rather low, some of the guiding tours even operate without guide-fees, and some tour guides even need to pay a certain amount of money to tour operators to bid tour group (Wong, Ap, Yeung, & Sandiford (1998a). K. Wong, J. Ap, K. Yeung and P. Sandiford. An evaluation of the need to upgrade the service professionalism of Hong Kong's tour co-ordinators, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong (1998). Wong, Ap, Yeung, & Sandiford (1998a). Therefore, tour guides rely heavily on shopping commissions as their major income. The low rating of this factor suggests an urgent need to regulate and monitor the unhealthy industry practices of tour operators and tour guides . A lowly paid tour guide will not be able to obtain optimum satisfaction from the job and this will lead to performance issues thereby leading to poor service quality to tourists (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006). The tourism industry is a low paid industry and most tour guides are employed on daily wages which are too little for sustenance. This is an area of concern which human resource must intervene and resolve. They must

provide for a standard industrial classification for jobs done by tour guides (Christensen & Nickerson, 1995). Nevertheless it is always powerful to align tour guide's interest by providing them rewards when they have achieved certain performance target as human resource perceive tour guides are always sensitive about the pay decisions (Rynes et al. 2004).

Time Management

One of the important aspects which tour guides must focus on is effectively managing time so that the tourists gets to see and enjoy the best package within a limited period of time. In order to effectively achieve this tour guide must organize the daily schedule and set goals and priorities (time – management – guide. com, 2011). Previous research has done a research survey to investigate the relationship between tour guide performance and tourist's satisfaction in the context of China's tourism industry, result has shown that “ tour guides are punctual” and “ tour guides try their best to follow itinerary and daily schedule” are two of the main criteria in achieving tourists' satisfaction (Huang, Hsu and Chan 2010).

Employee Benefits Administration

The human resource management which extends in covering tour guides under the program should ensure that they are entitled to certain privileges and benefits so that they derive job satisfaction. When tour guides are working in a good quality of work life, there will be a greater opportunity to affect their jobs, their contributions, overall effectiveness and the service they provide (Champion-Hughes 2001). Tour guides should be provided with Tourist Guide Passes which will avail them to enter tourist attractions including museums and wildlife parks and zoos without paying entry fees.

Also during peak tourist seasons they should be entitled to free or discounted fares when they need to use the public transport. Such benefits will help in delivering better service quality to tourists. (Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong, 2010) Other than this the type of tour that a guide conducts also entails him or her certain benefits. An all-inclusive tour will make the tour guide to get more benefits and earnings whereas a day to day tour will result in less benefits and earnings (jobmonkey. com, 2011).

Personnel Cost Planning

The human resource management must strive for effective personnel cost planning. They must aim for strategic planning so as to get the best services at the least cost. The total planning process must entail both management and operation planning and planning the cost incurred for hiring personnel should be effectively stressed upon. The human resource must effectively employ a cost – benefit analysis which helps in finding out the accrued expenditures in comparison with the costs involved. Depending on the costs and the revenues the human resource must effectively draw a balance so that they main attain maximum revenues by minimising costs and proper allocate the costs to other fields such as training and development to improve tour guide's service quality (Steiner, 1997)

Performance Appraisal

Performance appraisal is a standard practise which is followed in most organizations and industries. Previous studies have suggested that appraisal may play a key role to accomplish in the development, communication and to monitor quality standards (Deblieux, 1991; Fletcher, 1993).

It is one of the most important jobs for human resource to evaluate tour guide's performance (Behery and Paton 2008). It entails in considering the current state of performance of an employee over a period of time. (Bretz, Milkovich, Read, 1992). The evaluation process is argued to have a larger impact on tour guide's job behaviour than all the other managerial practices (Behery and Paton 2008). Performance appraisal is used as a widely supportive medium to effectively employ it as a measure for effective human resource management function (Ahmed, 1999). It is very necessary that performance appraisal is extended to tour guides so as to obtain better quality of services.

Researchers have argued that performance appraisal and feedback will directly affect tour guide's accomplishments, no matter the feedback is positive or negative (Greller and Parsons 1992). The human resource management must effectively implement performance appraisal among tour guides as this will help to motivate the tour guides to give quality services to tourists as they know that their work will be judged on certain parameters. According to the quality of service provided, their wages or / and salaries will be appraised. The human resource management should implement this as a part of the package in order to provide maximum satisfaction to clients. Besides, the use of reward schemes could also be applied to support quality initiatives. It is discussed that financial incentives have contribution to quality management and is to " risk demeaning the employees and attaching a price tag to their efforts" (Crosby 1980).

Labour Relations

The human resource management must adhere to provide a platform for cordial labour relations which help in increasing the quality of output. The work of tour guides entails emotional aspects of labour. Emotional labour occurs in face to face or voice to voice interactions with tourists, the emotional display has certain rules and display of emotions to influence the emotions of other people's attitudes and behaviours. Many tour guides may display fake emotions as they think that their job needs this type of emotion to be displayed (Wong & Wang, 2009). Human resource must strategically plan and implement participation, communication and involvement of tour guides by providing them equal opportunities thereby enabling good quality of working life (Leighton & Painter, 2001). The human resource team should effectively attempt to understand the employment relationship with relation to contemporary changes taking place in the country and the society. They must encourage ethics to be a part of the work culture while promoting and implementing this to tour guides (Ackers, 1994).

An employee relation is also recognised as internal marketing, in which it is critical in creating service mindedness for tour guides (Gronroos 1983). The practice will be able to raise a supportive and participative employee relations climate which could lead to positive improvements in perceived service quality.

Moreover lack of recognition by human resource is a vital issue which tends to affect tour guide's service quality. Often human resources are not willing to offer tour guides competitive remuneration and treat them as part time or casual employees while they are actually employed as a full-time worker.

Lack of recognition will further result in a high turnover rate whereas tour guides will decide to swap to other industries with more favourable pay and working conditions (Mak, Wong and Chang 2010).

Retention

High turnover rate can result in a significantly negative impact to the tourism industry. Turnover represents a loss of skills and will affect the efficiency and quality of service delivered. Reasons of turnover may include the seasonality of the tourism industry, retirement, dismissal and resignation, the challenge for human resource is that they can never predict when will turnover happens (Staw, 1980). To replace turnover tour guides, human resource need to recruit and train up another suitable person for the job to reach appropriate quality levels. Besides high turnover rates will result in low productivity and poor service.

Therefore human resource faces additional challenge and should have implement appropriate strategies for retention. The costs pay for retention such as offering a more attractive salary, improving working conditions and job security will definitely offset the costs for recruiting and training new ones (Berry 1983). Retention strategies will result in quality improvement and only satisfied tour guides can satisfy tourists (Rust et al. 1996).

In most areas licensed tour operators conduct guided tours wherein they educate and interpret information regarding the site to clients. Nowadays, tour guides are being recognized as a potential medium to deliver messages regarding protection and conservation of ecological reserves, minimal impact behaviour and heritage values. Hence, the human resource management

needs to research, develop, trial and then refine a tool which aims to monitor the effectiveness of interpretation experiences conducted by tour guides on guided tours in natural as well as cultural environments. Area managers operating in professional and general associations and bodies must intervene and recommend ways to support and manage tour guides and operators. They must focus on identifying a process through which tour operators can clearly transmit messages on focussing on sustainable tourism in a particular area to their clients. This will not only benefit the particular area but will also help in promoting current and future tourists (Armstrong & Weiler, 2003).

Tour guides and operators need to think beyond the limited research that they undertake in order to impart information to clients. They need to devise new and innovative skills in order to satisfy their clients which may be in finding out a new tourist attraction in the same area of a new shopping outlet which may intrigue the tourists. In order to get this done properly, there must be an organization or a body which monitors their performance and this is where experienced professionals in human resource must intervene in order to get the best results achieved from tour guides and operators in meeting the final goal of attaining optimum job and client satisfaction by maximizing their service quality.

3. 0Recommendations and Conclusion

3. 1 Conclusion

The improvement of tour guide's service quality relies on the human resources concerted efforts. In the age of competition and fast paced technology it is very essential that tour guides are one of the most visible

and critical players in tourism industry. They have the features to provide excellent quality of services so as to make an impressive tour experience. It is the sole responsibility of the tour guides to meet this objective. The acknowledgement of their importance and the effort in raising their level of skill and competence will result in the potential to generate greater profit and efficiency, and benefit the tourism industry as a whole.

Since there are research gaps in which previous studies have not focused on how to manage tour guide's service quality, and has left human resource management for tour guides an underdeveloped area, this paper has critically discussed the human resource practices to improve service quality of tour guides in the tourism industry.

In particular, there are three main perceptions in assessing the tour guiding service, they are core services delivery, customer orientation and communication effectiveness. Based on the three aspects, the service provided by tour guides will have a direct influence on tourists' satisfaction and indirect effect on satisfaction attained from tour services and overall tour experiences provided.

This study identifies the service gap often occurs between the service provided by a tour guide and the satisfaction attained from the service by a tourist. The gap represents a quality loss. Human resource is insisted as one of the critical issues causing the service gap, hence there should be a set appropriate human resource practice to minimize the service gap and to monitor the performance of tour guides.

Human resource consists of a range of practices such as recruiting, hiring the acquisition of employees, provides training and development and employee retention. Through all the practices, HRM could direct a professional approach to employee management as well as providing a competitive advantage over rivals by training and skills management to enhance the service quality of employees.

The human resource team must effectively train and manage tour guides especially because they need to develop and hone skills to enhance the service they provided. This is where experienced professionals in human resource must intervene in order to get the best results achieved from tour guides and operators in meeting the final goal of attaining optimum job and client satisfaction by maximizing their service quality.

3. 2 Recommendations

It is not overemphasizing the extent of professionalism of tour guides performance in a destination; one poor experience can eventually ruin the former hard-earned reputation. Therefore concerning tour guides' service quality and professionalism, destination government should help on ensuring a minimum level of service professionalism, to draw up a relevant Code of Conduct and ethic practices for tour guides and to review the disciplinary mechanism in anticipation of additional regulatory function.

To further enhance the service standards, destination government could also set up tour guides association and to design a standard tour guide training course together with an examination system to ensure the quality of tour guides are standardized within the destination tourism industry.

If the above-mentioned recommendations are implemented to destination tourism, it will certainly lead to visible improvements in the training and practice of tour guiding in Hong Kong. Leadership from tour operators and government is also required in taking an intensive and determined effort to improve tour guides' level of professionalism, as their actions influence, to a great extent, the role and activities of the tour guide.

3.3 Opportunities for Future Research

As this paper limits to a general human resource management on improving tour guide's service quality, future studies could critically discuss the human resource practice to improve service quality on a particular destination, comprising the cultural change, regulatory control and the overall tourism industry environment. Future studies can also focus on implementing human resource strategy in a developing country arising from the recommendations of its government planning on tourism, to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan and to outline challenges.

Moreover, human resource can specifically train tour guides to promote sustainability of destination tourism. Sustainable tourism is very important as it has the potential to stimulate the implementation of sustained development by following a holistic, interdisciplinary and integrative approach combining different aspects of existing tools to develop sustainable tourism. Future studies could examine the feasibility of implementing human resource management on tour guide to help on promoting or maintaining the sustainability of destination tourism.

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4. 0 References

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