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Introduction

The travel and tourism industry is a potential source of economic income for both developing and developed nations. The industry is highly important because it accounts for around 52 million employment opportunity as per statistics provided by the World Tourism Organization (2013).

However, the managers and organizers in the travel and tourism industry face significant challenges in selecting, maintaining and developing committed, motivated and competent personnel so as to offer excellent products and services to customers. Human resource experts maintain that significant challenges like low pay, working in shifts, long working hours, gender bias, non-existent or abysmal career opportunities and growth, high labour turnover, challenges in retention and selection of staff and lack of best practices in managing human resource have contributed to the unfavourable perceptions about employment conditions and practices in the travel and tourism industry. Furthermore, employers display reluctance to identify the challenges faced with the management of human resource in this sector. A case study analysis of a designer restaurant in the United Kingdom by Kelliher & Perrett (2001) has suggested the lack of managing human resources to gain competitive edge. One of the main reasons for this may be the differential treatment provided to personnel in this designer restaurant.

Human resource is one of the critical components which helps organizations to gain competitive edge. The travel and tourism industry have neglected its human resource over decades and this has led to the negative perception towards employee management in this sector.

Significance of human resource management in travel and tourism firms

Several elements explain the linkages between tourism labour like the qualification and skills of employees, seasonal and temporary employment, training and development costs, motivation and employee engagement and performance review. Academics have highlighted the need to invest in managing human resource in the travel and tourism segment so as to lessen negative perceptions towards employment opportunities in this sector.

However, employers have viewed training as a cost rather than preparing human resources to gain competitive edge. Managing human resources require planning, support and development of human resources. However, the sector is dominated by low pay and low skilled workers which leads to high labour turnover and decline in employee engagement, commitment and overall employee performance.

Another aspect of this industry is that it is managed by individuals having no formal training in tourism and travel. Hence there is a need to conceptualize and formulate a framework for the development and implementation of human resource management in this industry (Gruescu, Nanu & Tanasie 2009).

Training and development

The travel and tourism segment is dominated by individuals having little or no formal education in travel and tourism. Moreover, with the breakthrough of technology and globalization it has become necessary that this industry embraces excellent communication and information technology management to gain competitive edge.

The need for training and development stems from the fact that employees should have in-depth knowledge of customer needs and requirements and accordingly make use of systems and processes needed to satiate these requirements. A case study conducted in the Siem Reap-Angkor area located in Cambodia has revealed that effective use of communication technologies has helped in boosting tourism and garnering revenues (Grunfeld et al. 2012). Critics have mentioned that it is important that personal approach is integrated with the functions of information and communication technologies. This is mainly because travel agents need to adjust themselves to suit changes in the market and the environment and accordingly communicate with customers. A case study conducted among the supervisors of a travel agency in Croatia has disclosed the function of information and communication technologies to strategically develop the travel agencies to understand conditions under which ICT may be effectively applied (Mihajlovic 2012). Accordingly training needs have been identified and models were formulated to train employees to develop excellent interpersonal, communication and required technical skills to operate effectively. The above case studies emphasize on the significance of providing adequate training and development to personnel so as to effectively management communication and information technology to gain competitive gain through effective human resource management in the travel and tourism sector.

Communication and change management in human resource

The advent of globalization and technological breakthrough has led to significant restructuring of processes and systems. The travel and tourism industry has switched over from manual to automated systems and communication plays a significant part for effective functioning of processes and systems. One of the relevant change management models is that of Kurt Levin's planned model for change (Mihalic & Buhalis 2013). According to this model, change can be brought about by participating in group discussions, social change and implementation. A relevant model which has been developed from Levin's change model is that proposed by Harper. He maintains that change management restructuring process should follow the three simple steps of unfreezing, change process initiation and refreezing. Change management in the travel and tourism industry is needed to adapt to the rapidly changing technology. With the advent of automation, there is increased need of tools like internet, website, computer reservation system and global reservation systems which helps in effective outcome achievement within a short period of time. Synonymous with information technology is the development in communication technologies.

Another aspect to consider is the causes of conflict and the manner in which they are resolved. One of the significant causes of conflict is the resentment and mismatch between the objectives and the actual outcomes set by diverse partners (Hales 1986). This may be resolved by holding dialogues and negotiations. It is essential that partners need to communicate with each other regarding the service quality, price and other aspects that may impact the overall objective. Accordingly, goals and targets should be

matched to be compatible with diverse stakeholder aspirations. This requires excellent persuasive and rhetoric skills. However, it has been observed that partners may terminate taking services from another partner due to resentment and mismatch in goals. Human resource management practices must also include the resolution of conflicts which may lead to long term partnerships between relevant stakeholders.

Significant devices are provided by the development of information and communication technologies which help in effective global operation of the travel and tourism industry. One of the significant advantages of information and communication technologies is that it augments ICT boosts the globalization of industry by providing efficient tools for vendors to develop, operate and globally distribute their offer (Mihalic & Buhalis 2013). These technologies also aim to reduce costs and augment effectiveness. However, it is important that human resource is adequately trained to use, create, share and access information available through these technologies. Such technologies aid global participants in the market to share the process of production, specifications and aim to create transparency leading to lower price.

Employee motivation, productivity and engagement

It is essential that employees are motivated and engaged by human resource so that their productivity and overall performance is enhanced. The level of involvement and commitment of personnel towards the organization is employee engagement. Especially in the travel and tourism sector, there is a gender bias which leads to unfair reward systems for employees. A survey conducted by academic scholars have revealed that employees prefer an

organization which provides equitable reward system (Kovacevic, Gajic & Penic 2012). Employees believe that non-monetary and monetary rewards help in enhancing job satisfaction, motivation and performance.

In this case the Maslow's need theory of motivation is highly relevant.

Human resource in travel and tourism industry has to develop a package which helps in fulfilling the esteem needs. Other than the lower order needs, it is essential that higher order needs are satiated for employees to be motivated. Providing a reward package and an equitable mix of salary containing incentives and bonuses will help employees to be engaged and motivated and will therefore lead to enhanced productivity.

Ethics, corporate social; responsibility and HRM

The assumption behind the concept of corporate social responsibility is that the organization is a part of the society and hence, it should aim to attain societal objectives. The travel and tourism industry have relevant stakeholders including the employees and practices of corporate social responsibility helps in enhancing employee morale, engagement and commitment. A survey conducted by academic scholars on the practices of social responsibility in the tourist hotels in Kenya revealed that such practices have led to the motivation and engagement of employees.

However, critics have maintained that the corporate social responsibility practices of “going green” and “sustainable tourism” are conducted in most travel and tourism industry with an aim to woo customers rather than satiate the employee's motivation levels (Cheruiyot & Maru 2012).

A significant challenge faced by human resource practitioners is the lack of a formal code of ethics. Most travel and tourism firms does not believe in

formulating formal ethical code. This leads to gender biases with respect to recruitment and selection of personnel (Payne & Dimanche 1996). This industry is plagued by long working hours and the lack of an ethical code leads to preferential recruitment of personnel.

Performance management systems

Most travel and tourism organizations refrain from inventing in its personnel. It is essential that organizations conduct performance measure of its human resources so that it is easy to evaluate their performance. It is essential that employees are provided training and empowered so that their performance is enhanced. The balanced scorecard approach to performance management proposed by Kaplan and Norton equips supervisors to design performance management goals and further relating them with the strategy of the organization. This system encourages teamwork and learning and supports strategic goals (Phillips & Louvieris 2005). One of the main challenges faced by human resource management is to formulate and implement performance management checks with an overall approach to promote employee and organizational development. It is necessary that best practices are formulated in alignment with diverse tourism bodies and the government regulations so that strategies are formulated and adequate performance management measures are undertaken.

Conclusion

The implementation of human resource processes and systems in the travel and tourism industry has been highly ignored. This had led to the development of unfavourable perception about the labour market. The non-

existent functioning of human resource practices and systems have led to lack of skilled labour in this industry. It is essential that proper human resource management processes and systems are followed so as to gain competitive edge. Employers should understand that it is essential to explore human resource management systems so that the workforce can be used to gain competitive edge and lead to greater economic development.

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