

CENTUM

International Conference

Theme:

**“Emergence of India
as a Global Economy :
Challenges and Opportunities”**

In Association with



**Shri Jagdishprasad
Jhabarmal Tibrewala University
&**



**NCRD'S
STERLING INSTITUTE
OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES**

Venue:

**NCRD's Sterling Institute of
Management Studies**

Plot No. 93/93A, Sector 19,
Near Seawoods Railway Station,
Nerul (East), Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra 400706

Published by:



J. J. T University
Jhunjhunu,
Rajasthan (India)

**24th
January
2015**

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CHANGING ROLE OF HR IN HOTEL INDUSTRY – A STUDY OF HOTELS IN PUNE, INDIA

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▼ ABSTRACT

Hospitality by its definition is to care of its guests keeping with the concept of 'Atithi Devo Bhava' Hotels get its business only if guests are satisfied with services provided to them. Employees in the hotels thus have to ensure that guests are satisfied. There is a general view that the hotel industry is facing the personnel related problems such as low wages, long working hours, shift patterns of duties, lack of proper career structure and high labor turnover. These factors affect morale of employees. To change the scenario hotels have now started using innovative HR practices to motivate employees.

▼ KEY WORDS

Hotel Industry, HR practices, Employee motivation, Changing trends, Innovative practices

▼ INTRODUCTION

Hotels and Hospitality generators are among the biggest employment generator in the country. Traditionally, HR in Indian Hospitality was mainly a business with complete emphasis on personnel management¹. The demand for hotels in India is increasing due to increase in tourism as well as globalization. This has lead to demand for skilled employees.

There is a general view that the hotels in India is facing personnel related problems such as low wages, long working hours, shift patterns of duties, lack of proper career structure and high labor turnover. To change this scenario, HR took the leapfrog from being 'administrative supporters' to 'business partners' working closely towards the development and evolution of human capital² Going beyond the traditional role of personnel department, the hotels are experimenting with new approaches to HRM. Therefore in this context HR should not be defined by what it does but what it brings results that enhance the organization's value to customers, investors and

Therefore this research sought to focus on changing role of HR in hotel industry.

The research is focused on four star and five star hotels in Pune, India. Many of these hotels are operating premium brands of international hotel chains. The study is based on data collection by interviewing HR managers of hotels and secondary data includes literature review, interviews of HR managers of various hotels published in hotel magazines and websites.

The findings indicated that there is a shift of HR functions from traditional approach to adopting unique steps to motivate the employees and improve their work life balance.

employees²

Being a part of service based and customer oriented industry, the human capital is the greatest source of competitive advantage for any hospitality industry³. Human resources are assets for the organization and quality of manpower is very important in hospitality industry. Therefore employee development can play a vital role in the success of any organization.

With the rapid expansion of hotels with international standards and the intensifying competition every organization is very keen about having skilled and experienced staff. These international hotel brands have a distinct advantage to utilize their global practices to attract high potential talent. Their presence has made it challenging for hotels to identify and recruit prospective workforce. The importance of employee motivation and development needed to be highlighted to retain them. The HR policies and practices therefore play a major role in success of the organization.

This research sought to assess the changing role of HR and its initiatives towards employee motivation, development and the innovative practices used by HR

▼ REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The hospitality industry relies on customer satisfaction for

success and continued revenue⁴. Success of hotel industry can be achieved through the high quality service to their clients. People are the greatest asset of virtually every organization {3}. It is challenging for hotels to deal with human resource issues. The hospitality industry has the reputation, well or ill deserved of being slow to adopt innovation {4} It was very essential for hotels to change this scenario. Research have shown that HRM practices can make an important, practical difference in terms of three key organizational outcomes: productivity, quality of work life and profit {1} The advancement of technology, versatile nature of job, need of specialization have increased the importance of manpower in hotel industry. The success of any organization mainly depends on the quality and quantity of its human resources. There lies significance of human resource management. It cannot be denied that the human element in hospitality organization is critical for service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty, competitive advantage and organizational performance {6}. For any organization human resource is now a source of competitive advantage. Organizations and managers in the hospitality industry face real challenges in recruiting, developing and maintaining a committed, competent, well managed and self motivated workforce which is focused on offering a high quality {7} Diverse and complex nature of this sector leads to retaining the manpower and motivating and encouraging them to perform better. The most admired companies are also aware that ongoing development opportunities and clear career paths are important motivators for promoting retention and professional growth {5} During recent years, the hospitality sector has taken initiative to improve its role in human relation. HR should play a significant role in organizations which entail being involved in overall business strategic issues as well as integrating HRM policies and practices {9} The review of past literature has reflected the multifaceted function of HR development in the hospitality industry. It requires proper strategic planning to acquire, motivate, retain and enhance performance, loyalty, commitment and human touch {8}. Most of the novel practices cost little but offer significant benefits. The importance of changing role of HR needs to be considered. The change in the hospitality trends has also transformed the face of human resource {2}. This research makes an attempt to study these changes in HR department.

▼ METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of research, the focus was on four star and five star hotels having similarities in the hospitality sector. This approach was taken to ensure that the findings would be more relevant. After identifying the hotels, the study was carried out about their HR policies, practices and systems through interviews. The result presented below includes explanation regarding changing role of HR in the areas of

employee motivation, career advancement and improvement in work life balance.

This study was based on descriptive survey research design. A questionnaire was formulated for data collection. Primary data was collected from the answers given by the respondents. For the study the participants were selected through purposive sampling included human resource practitioners at each hotel as they deal with human related issues daily and possessed appropriate information in the area of study.

The particular strength of this study was its interviews which enabled a more thorough exploration of the thinking of participants than often in case of quantitative survey.

▼ DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Pune has seen rapid growth of hospitality sector over two decades. The entry of many international brands has created a competitive environment in the industry. Hotels being customer oriented business, manpower that provides these services plays a crucial role. The HR in hotels is therefore coming up with policies and practices that will attract talented workforce. Efforts are taken to motivate the employees, provide them with an appropriate advancement plan and allow them to grow in the organization. At the same time care is taken that organizational culture is maintained. The survey sought the information in various areas of HR practices

There is a combination of international and Indian brands of hotels in Pune like Westin , Four Points by Sheraton , J.W. Marriot , Courtyard by Marriot , Hyatt Regency , Novotel , Orchid , Sun – n – Sand and so on. With the entry of international hotel brands in the Indian industry across different categories, there is a need for all hotels to become more manpower efficient and reconsider their staffing requirement. This has reflected in the HR policies of most of the hotels.

Employee empowerment has been found to be the key factor in most international hotel brands where employees are given a certain degree of autonomy and responsibility for decision making regarding their specific organizational tasks. This has benefited the hotels for building trust among the employees. All the hotels in the sample strongly agree that the role of human resource in the industry has changed from its traditional approach. Trends in the HR practices are changing and hotels have adopted unique steps to motivate employees and to perform superlatively.

Hotels in our samples believe that employee motivation is the best tool to retain employees for a longer period of time. International hotels in our sample have found to be using good plans for financial motivation. Employees in these hotels are motivated to up sell their product like a hotel room, food and beverages and other services of hotels. They are awarded with incentives. This encourages employees and they have been found doing well to increase hotel sale

thereby increasing profitability of the hotel. All the hotels have a policy of sharing tips received from the guests, where point system is used to decide the share.

Non-financial motivators are on the top agenda of all the hotels. Motivational Quotes are found been displayed all over the back office area. They believe that appreciation and recognition play a vital role in encouraging the employees. The best employees are awarded with employee of the year and on quarterly basis. Awards are offered in the form of appreciation letter given to the staff for their excellent work as deserved. Appreciations and recognitions are sometimes lined with financial benefits. The hotels have started to lift up their associates motivation by providing them complimentary off for rendering duties during the festive seasons or restricted holidays.

It was found that employees' engagement and communication has gain importance as a part of HR policies. Hotels arrange staff parties at regular intervals. Employees are involved in communication where updates about birthdates, responsible business and health tips are given. Hotels are carrying out 360 degree audits where they conduct feedback from peers, subordinates and senior for every employee. This has helped to keep the employees alert in giving their best performance.

The 24x7 structural set up makes hospitality a difficult scenario. During the festivals, work pressure increases. It was observed that hotels are making sure that employees too enjoy the festive moods. As a part of welfare activities few hotels celebrate these moments. Hotels in our samples arrange for a flexible duty roaster so that every team member could spend a quality time with their families. Hotels are also organizing occasion based get together, fun activities and special menu for the employees.

Career advancement policies are also gaining importance in HR policies of the hotels. For every employee a well organized career advancement path is very important to grow in the industry. Few hotels are following the practices of performance based promotions. Most of the hotels in our sample take an effective approach to performance management having measuring effectiveness. Hotels are offering various career development programs for the employees. Extensive trainings are arranged for employees followed by scheduled examinations. Training are in the form of online training, cross training, classroom training and so on. It was found that these activities are clearly linked with employee development and their right career path. In addition to the training, most of the hotels in our sample have developed specific and clearly defined career path for retaining and developing their own employees. Hotels offer various programs like Employee development program, Executive development program and Management development program for employees at every level.

Hotels are now creating an infrastructure to promote work life balance. Employees have been provided with various facilities so that work and personal life both can be

balanced. Employees' needs are taken into consideration and facilities are provided accordingly. Few hotels in our sample provide the employees a help to carry out their personal work at minimum cost. Hotels also have a store facility for employees once in a week where employees can purchase vegetables, fruits, groceries at wholesale rate. There is a fitness centre, recreation room, game zone almost in every hotel.

Another key feature of these hotels was emphasis on team building. Hotels are found to be using team building techniques to enhance team spirit which is an integral part of any organization's success. They are following practice of dividing employees in various houses which is a homogenous group from all departments. Various activities and competitions are conducted between them.

Some international brands have gone ahead and implemented innovative practices in hotels to encourage employees. In few hotels among the sample General manager takes the training of employees on revenue per available room, profitability, company value and culture. It gives a good impact on employees. In few other hotels night shift staff gets to eat breakfast with managers in the morning so that they can interact with them. Theme lunches are arranged for employees where senior leadership team serves the junior employees. These hotels have formed wellness forum which decides on menu in the canteen for employees. It also has a committee formed which deals with sexual harassment cases if any. Medical facilities are provided to the staff and their family members. The hotels are found to be taking a good care of employees and paying attention to almost every aspect of employee development.

▼ FINDINGS

In the research various categories of human resource practices are identified. These include-

1 Employee motivation, both financial and non financial motivators to encourage employees to perform better. The findings reveal that the positive efforts are taken by hotels to motivate employees.

2 Career advancement programs that are aligned with the growth of employees. From the findings there is an evidence of HR efforts for employee development and career planning.

3 Various practices followed in the hotels to enhance work life balance of employees.

4 Innovative HR practices to attract and retain a loyal and competent workforce.

From the findings it can also be revealed that along with the routine HR policies a lot of attention has been given to enhance the organizational culture.

▼ RECOMMENDATIONS

Researcher agrees to the belief that hospitality industry

faces the problem of employee attrition. Though the efforts are taken by the hotels to maintain the pool of talented workforce, low wages is still a critical issue. There should be proper monetary compensation paid to the employees for the services rendered by them. It is a service oriented sector and employees have to remain on their toes to serve best to their customers. Therefore there is a need to fulfill their financial requirements. Bill Marriott once said, "If we take care of our people, they will take care of our guests"⁵. All the hotels should take a note of this fundamental.

▼ CONCLUSION

The hotel industry is changing and so is the role of human resource management. The hotels of the type under research are giving high degree of importance to human resource issues. There is a paradigm shift of HR functions from traditional approach to adopting unique steps to motivate the employees. The hotels are adopting innovative methods to build a strong bond between employer and employees which have helped retaining the talent. International hotel brands are giving lot of importance on human related issues for success of a business. The Indian hotels need to follow on their footsteps.

▼ END NOTES

- 1 see <http://www.hospitalitynet.org/news/4064661.html> May 2013
- 2 see http://www.internationalseminar.org/XIII_AIS/TS%205/24.%20Mr.%20Anuj%20Kumar.pdf
- 3 see www.fhrai.com April 2014
- 4 see http://www.ehow.com/facts_6727902_importance-customer-service-hospitality-industry.html#ixzz2lB18J3D6
- 5 see www.fhrai.com December 2011

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