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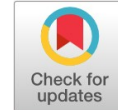


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ESSENTIAL GENERIC SKILLS FOR HUMAN RESOURCES IN HOSPITALITY: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract. The Hospitality industry in India is undergoing rapid growth. This brings challenges to the Human Resource department to recruit staff with the right attitude, required skills and abilities. Generic skills play a major role in building the right attitude. The paper aims to examine the literature relating to generic skills required for human resources in the hospitality industry and focuses on the approaches that can be used to enhance the delivery of these skills to sustain performance and meet the workplace's demands. A survey for the said research has been carried out through in-depth literature review. Essential generic skills identified for the human resources of the hospitality industry are Impression management skills, relaxation skills, motor skills, manual skills, communication skills, problem-solving skills, decision-making skills, social skills, people skills, mood management skills, stress management skills, goal management skills, time management skills, conflict management skills and leadership skills. These skills can be developed through continuous focused efforts by the employees and training carried out by the learning and development department in hospitality.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the research paper is to examine the literature relating to generic skills required for human resources in the hospitality industry and also focuses on the approaches that can be used to enhance the delivery of these skills to sustain performance and meet the demands of the work place.

Background

The Hospitality industry in India is undergoing a rapid growth. This brings in challenges to the Human Resource department to recruit staff with the right attitude, required skills and abilities. Generic skills play a major role in building the right attitude. Though recent advances in technology have modified the operating procedures, human touch in service sector cannot be completely eliminated. Therefore, excellent staff with a mix of generic skills and a thorough knowledge of operations in hospitality is the key to deliver excellent services.

Jobs in the hospitality sector are strenuous and physically demanding. This takes a toll on the mental and physical health of the employees. Employees are thus required to be supported by the management in dealing with work pressure, which could be effectively done through planned training sessions on generic skills. Employees in hospitality are from various strata of the society, with different educational, cultural and financial background which influences their behavior and personality. This behavior pattern may reflect in their approach towards tackling different aspects during the execution and performance of their

duties. Employees interact with the guests during service. Cool temperament of the employees is required to handle conflicting situation and complaints of guests. Hence utmost patience while dealing with guests and fellow employees is the pre-requisite. Progress in performance is a challenge facing every employee in hospitality. It is important that the hotel employees focus on skill development through a comprehensive and integrated approach. The skill gaps exhibited hint at the necessity to build more soft skills and to build greater customer relationship. (National Skill Development Cooperation, 2016). The convention industry continues to suffer from a lack of qualified professionals, due to increasing demand for personnel as a result of more meeting facilities, growing number of events held annually, and the aging of current employees (Phelan & Mills, 2010). Hospitality industry has no choice but to recruit from the available human resources who are untrained, unqualified or qualified in faculty other than hospitality. The employees are thus required to be trained in operational skills as well as generic skills which are most important in service industry. Much time and money is lost in the process of training and retraining the human resources to make them competent and knowledgeable about the management policy, SOPs, and related skills. Anything you can do to reduce those skill deficiencies will be beneficial to the employee and beneficial to your business (Vaughan, 2012).

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Importance of Generic Skills in the Hospitality Industry

“A generic skill is a skill which can be applied across a variety of subject domains, and takes longer to acquire than domain-dependent (subject-area) skills. It is what Gagne refers to as ‘cognitive strategies’ and what many cognitive scientists refer to as domain-independent knowledge” (Reigeluth, 2015).

Generic skills are important for success in employment and life and are developmental and progressive (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012).

Generic skills also referred to as life skills starting with self. Knowing oneself is crucial for progress in personal as well as professional life. It is important to understand self-development and areas of self-development to enhance the personality of employees in hospitality. Self-development means preserving our best traits while replacing dysfunctional or negative patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving which subject us to stress, conflict and failure with more functional patterns that ensures success (Sudesh, 2004).

In all the competency research related to hospitality management, essential competencies include skills that can be classified as soft skills, yet a comprehensive list of these soft skills has not been identified (Weber, Finley, Crawford & Rivera, 2009). In hospitality industry, tremendous importance is laid on the quality of tangible and intangible aspects of service. Hotel product forms the tangible aspect whereas the employee attitude and behavior during presenting the hotel product to the guest form the intangible aspect of customer service. Anticipating the needs and wants of the guests and delivering to the desired expectation of guests and management is a challenge to the employees. Guests demand high-quality personalized service and value for money. Each guest expects to be treated like a VIP. To react to the feelings of guest quickly and appropriately and deliver to the complete satisfaction of the guest has a competitive advantage to all hospitality businesses. Employees’ behavior has great effect on overall customer satisfaction regardless of customers’ gender, nationality and purpose of visit, number of visits and length of stay (Kattara, Weheba & El-Said, 2008).

Hotel chains across the world are gearing up to the traveller of the future by recruiting the ‘right fit’, providing specialized training and combining high tech inputs with high touch culture (Ipe, 2008) Managers must go beyond employee attitudes and work towards making all associates feel that they are members of a team, well trained and give appropriate tools and policies to provide the best possible customer service (Garlick, 2010). Employees who perceive they have the opportunity to develop new skills are more satisfied with their jobs, more loyal and more likely to stay with the organization (Costen & Salazar, 2011).

Essential Generic Skills for Human Resources in Hospitality

Impression Management Skills

Impression Management is usually used synonymously with self-presentation, in which a person tries to influence the perception of their image (Wikipedia, 2016). Organizations use branding and other impression management strategies to convey a consistent and repeatable image to external and internal audiences (Boundless.com, 2016). Hospitality industry lays importance on grooming and personal hygiene of staff. At any given time the staff needs to present themselves in the prescribed manner. The topic on personality and self-presentation in the form of physical appearance detailing the grooming and personal hygiene standards expected of each of the staff is dealt in the induction program for new recruits. Human resource is a mirror of the hospitality industry. They reflect the highest standards that the industry wants to convey to the customer who pays high room rates and for other services and expects high standards of grooming and personal hygiene of the staff. The physical appearance of staff in the hotel whether they are in direct contact or indirect contact with the guest constitutes to impression of the hotel. The staff needs to enhance and adhere to the grooming standards of the hotel at all times by immaculately following the dress code and personal hygiene standards. “How you present yourself on the job not only impacts your success but also reflects on the whole organization and affects its good reputation” (Business & Legal Resources, 2016).

Relaxation Skills

Health is another aspect of the concept of personality. Diet, rest and exercise are the components of health. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social being and not just merely absence of illness” (Sudesh, 2004). Employees in the hospitality industry are exposed to physical and mental tasks which call for acquiring relaxation skills. Staff should be trained to relax by teaching relaxation techniques which would help regain the strength and enthusiasm resulting in enhanced performance at work.

Motor Skills

Motor skills involve learning to move various parts of one’s body in response to certain external or internal stimuli. “Motor skills are needed for all employees from janitor to the general manager” (Aswathappa, 2013). Staff from the Housekeeping, Kitchen, F and B Service, Bell Desk, and Maintenance department are required to lift heavy equipment, furniture etc.. Maintenance staff is usually carpenters, plumbers, AC mechan-

ics, painters, gardeners and utilities whose nature of work is laborious. Similarly the staff in the housekeeping department is required to make beds, lift luggage of guests, lift furniture and equipment for cleaning purpose. Staff from kitchen is required to lift heavy degchies, pushing and pulling trollies etc. Service staff is involved in lifting heavy equipment and furniture for arranging buffets and conferences. Bellboys from Bell Desk lift guest luggage to be placed on the trolley and taken to the guest room. All the hotel employees in these areas should be trained in Motor Skills to avoid self-injury while executing their work.

Manual Skills

“Manual work is work in which you use your hands or your physical strength rather than your mind.” Most of the tasks in the departments in hospitality are done by hands i.e. manually. Manual skills also form a part of operational skills like making of beds by room attendant in the guest room, vacuuming of carpets with the help of carpet brush in case the vacuum cleaner is out of order etc. In the kitchen it could be whisking of fresh cream or egg whites with the help of a hand whisk instead of the electrical whisk etc. Basically using of hands with skill and precision in performing work using tools, equipment and instruments.

Communication Skills

The employee in hospitality communicates with the guests, colleagues and co-workers. The need for communication skills can be seen at all levels. Communication skills would mean linguistic competency like reading skills, writing skills, asking skills, listening skills and speaking skills. Understanding verbal and non-verbal communication including kinesics would ensure good customer service. “Good communication skills will impress your guests which will further prove beneficial to your hotel business” (Pathak, 2016).

Problem Solving Skills

“One of the greatest challenges in a hotel is to change an upset and angry guest with a problem into a satisfied happy guest who will enjoy his or her stay and return to the hotel again” (Hozpitalityplus, 2016). Staff is constantly faced with challenging situations with guests and co-workers, which requires special abilities to deal with. This involves problem solving skills. Problem solving skills help the employees by being more confident in dealing with guest complaints and by reducing conflicts with co-workers, thus benefitting the entire organization.

Decision Making Skills

“Ability to make decisions leads to more and better opportunities for success, which improves your quality of life.” (Discover

Business, 2016). Hospitality industry involves complex decision making. Managers are expected to make tough decisions. Knowledge and experience with decision making tools and making actual decisions is at the core of sound management (O’Halloran, 2016).

Social Skills

Hospitality is a service industry that deals with people having different personality types and exhibiting different attitudes and beliefs. Employees and guests are from different cultural backgrounds and geographical locations. The employees must understand themselves and others and study their behavior and skills. Social skills are important in all jobs in hospitality. “To understand what they are, we need to look at the words ‘social’ and ‘skills’ separately- social can be defined as ‘of society; concerned with mutual relations of human beings; living in organized communities, and skills can be defined as expertness; practiced ability’” (Dalton, 2004).

People Skills

“People skills or interpersonal skills are the tools people use to interact and communicate with individuals in an organizational environment” (Study.com, 2016) “Mediocre interpersonal skills are the major weakness of the labor force and job satisfaction is significantly correlated with job performance” (Gu & Siu, 2009). The findings of the research by Plangpramool (2012) show that interpersonal communication is a foundational effort of organizational success and human relations and the practices of interpersonal communication of the hotel properties are considered to be a crucial part and success factor in the hospitality industry (Plangpramool, 2012).

Mood Management Skills

“Emotional stability implies the ability to come to terms with our feelings and not allowing them to spiral out of control and bring about consequences that are inimical to our happiness and jeopardize our survival and existence” (Sudesh, 2004). All human beings have emotions. The behavior of a person may depend on his mood. “Mood management skills teach to control impulsive feelings and behaviors, manage ones emotions, take initiative, follow through on commitments, and adapt to changing circumstances” (Ravikumar, 2015).

Stress Management Skills

Work pressure and problems are unavoidable for employees at the workplace in hospitality. How the employee reacts to this pressure decides the level of stress that the employee experiences. Employee stress is a significant issue in the hospitality industry. John W ’O Niel investigated whether the stressors

were linked to the hotel employee health and work outcome. The finding shows that more employee and co-worker stressors were linked to hotel employee health and work outcomes. (O'Neill & Davis, 2011). Understanding how to manage and deal with stress can help employees feel more relaxed and work with efficiency (Jacolbia, 2016)

Goal Management Skills

Goal setting is essential for hospitality employees to progress and succeed in their career. "Goal management is more than just assigning objectives and reviewing employee performance, the true purpose of having management goals is to use and develop your employees' talents, skills and experience while helping your organization meet its overall goals".

Goal Management Skills can Provide Clear Direction to Supervisors and Employees to:

- Form a common frame of reference around which they can effectively communicate.
- Clearly indicate success, and can cultivate a strong sense of fulfillment for those working towards achieving the goals.
- Help clarify the specific expectations of the supervisor and employee (Free Management Library, 2016).

Time Management Skills

Time Management skills are required to make the best use of time. The employees should be taught to understand the concept of time management and use it in their day to day operations. "Results of a survey of 100 customers suggest that customer behavior is affected by the length of time they have to wait" (Jones & Dent, 1994). Time management training will reduce guest complaints due to delay in service.

Conflict Management Skills

A study undertaken by Sepehri, Batman, Kingir and Arpaci, (2014) reveals that the hotels frequently experienced conflicts among employees which cause dissatisfaction among employees as well as the guests. "Dissatisfied customers, miscommunication between staff, alcohol-affected patrons, and personality clashes: conflict is a daily part of working in hospitality, this is why it is so important that we all have finely tuned conflict

management skills" (Teaching Resources Online, 2016).

Thus learning to manage conflict and leaving guests feeling positive will earn revenue for hospitality industry through repeated business.

Leadership Skills

Organizations are built by effective leaders. "Research suggests that effective leadership enables organizations to be more successful, to adjust to changing economic pressures, and to increase employee satisfaction, there is clearly a need, therefore, for the hospitality and tourism industries to understand what constitutes effective leadership and how it can be achieved." (Gillet & Morda, 2003). Leadership skills imparted to employees would help them to better understand the intricacies of business development. "Hospitality employers are now looking for inspired leaders with their fingers on the pulse of new customer service markets and seeking out leaders who can build consensus, motivate staff and associates, secure record profits and otherwise serve their employers' best interests in the coming era" (Michigan State University, 2016).

Walker and Miller (2009) suggest making leadership skills a focus of management training to implement ongoing program that focuses on priorities, creating change and presentation skills and to recognize, reward and celebrate leaders for their passion, dedication and results. (Walker & Miller, 2009).

CONCLUSION

Essential generic skills identified for the human resources of hospitality industry are: Impression management skills, relaxation skills, motor skills, manual skills, communication skills, problem solving skills, decision making skills, social skills, people skills, mood management skills, stress management skills, goal management skills, time management skills, conflict management skills and leadership skills. Hospitality industry, with a relatively divergent social, cultural and educational profile of employees faces challenges in the development of generic skills. All of these skills can be developed through continuous focused training to enhance productivity, improve the overall hospitality experience of the guests and establish a work life balance.

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