

Perceptions on Training Functions Practised in Hotels in Penang

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ABSTRACT

Training functions are widely needed and known for its importance in organisations all over the world. Top management needs to be committed to training functions and development activities. This is because top management plays critical role in the success or failure of any training functions. Unfortunately, in Malaysia, it is not given sufficient focus yet as it is assumed to be costly and a waste of time, but in hotel industry, training is needed very much as it involves the staff skills and performance. This study examined the background characteristics of selected hotels in Penang and the contributing factors of the improper practice of training functions in hotels.

Keywords: Training, perception on training function, training practised, hotel in Penang.

1. INTRODUCTION

Hotel industry is one of Malaysia's sources of income generating and source of workforce. The industry is also a huge source of jobs. Hotels, resorts and restaurants represent tremendous revenue potential and employment opportunity for people with a broad spectrum of skills (Herman & Eller, 1991). Malaysian tourism industry is considered widely known all over the world because of the beautiful scenery, great weather & lovely culture among the Malaysian population. These factors attract tourist all over the world to come back to Malaysia to enjoy the amusing and interesting characteristics in our country. Therefore, hotel industry plays important roles in ensuring that tourism activities increases and delivers a great image to our nation and country throughout the world. Services in hotels play major roles in ensuring that customers would come back for another stay at the hotels. This would only be possible if the customers

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are satisfied with the services provided. The staff then needs regular training routines and guidance in delivering their professional skills in performing their work. Training functions are widely needed and known for its importance in organisations all over the world. Top management needs to be committed to training and development activities, including the involvement in assessing training plans and policies and creating a suitable environment in order to implement plans and policies. This is because top management support plays critical roles in the success or failure of any training and development activities (Khulida, 1999). Unfortunately, in Malaysia, it is not given sufficient focus yet as it is assumed to be costly and a waste of time, but in hotel industry training is indeed very much needed as it involves the staff skills and performance.

1.1 Statement of Problem

Hotel employees need to get sufficient skills in performing their work as service line workers has to be well trained to be skillful and able to deliver superb services to the hotel guests. Unfortunately, training functions are not given much emphasis in the hotel industry. It is seen that the competence of the staff in hotel industry is low and this gives an impact to the low performance and productivity of the company. Hotel management needs to carry out training functions to increase the staff's competence and later lead to a better performance of the staff in delivering their daily duties. The attitude of employer's towards Human Resource Development Practices, mainly training functions in hotel management plays important roles for the building of employees' competence and motivation in providing better performances for the companies' productivity and survival in the industry.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the literature review is to provide a summary of the theories and researches related to this study.

2.1 Hotel Industry

Effective employee training is the key to successful food-safety programmes at hotels, according to hotel quality-assurance executives. As a result, some chains are developing new training programmes or more effectively communicating current rules and regulations to employees (Blank, 2000). Therefore, it is essential for all hotel management to stress on the importance of training functions in order to ensure that staff is well trained and delivers their duties successfully. Service quality is identified as a performance indicator (Worsfold, 1999). This is why hotel staff needs to get sufficient training and development towards improvement in their performance in ensuring the service quality delivered are superb, talked about and welcomed. Service industry also needs to

stress on the need for training functions as it is the key to the company's business as the performance of the staff represents the hotel's profit and stability in the industry.

2.2 Training

Tourism Policy Group (1995) stated that the need for sound human resource procurement and development practices is today more vital than ever. Training functions should be given more emphasis in order to gain more efficient and productivity of the hotels' staff. The attitude towards training and human resource development by the employers in the tourism sector is also queried. An industry-wide initiative is required to improve the industry's human resource practices to enable it to attract and retain quality workers and to develop a training culture in the newer sectors of the industry.

2.3 The Need of Training in Hotel Industry

Service organisations are in need of mechanisms by which it can reduce this input of uncertainty and acquire the information necessary for effective service production. The role of employee becomes much more critical to a very extent the employee is the service, given the absence of any tangible artifacts. They carry the responsibility of projecting the image of the organisation and it is in their hands that the ultimate satisfaction of the customers rests (Redman & Mathews, 1998).

Chiang, C. F., Back, K.J. and Canter, D. (2005) conducted a study on job satisfaction towards training and suggested that employers need to realize the importance of training quality and its consequences and more attention need to be emphasized on employee training. When employees perceived that they are given low training quality, it suggested that the employees were not satisfied with training quality and that training quality needed improvement. Training is positively related to training satisfaction and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction ensures that the employees would positively have intention to stay. The indirect effect of training quality on intention to stay was mediated by job satisfaction. Therefore it is very important for hotel management to ensure that their employees are satisfied with the training conducted and happy with the workplace. Then only it ensures that they have intension to further work in the company and perform their best on a day to day basis.

2.4 Factors Contributing Towards Improper Practice of Training Functions in Hotel Industry

Training functions practised in the selected hotels differ between hotels due to a few contributing factors mainly following variables: lack of realisation of the

importance of training functions, lack of manpower in HR Departments, lack of financial requirement to operate training functions, lack of management's policy, leadership, skills, knowledge, attitudes, expertise and lack of realisation of the outcome of training functions among the management team of the selected hotels.

2.4.1 Lack of Realisation of the Importance of Training Functions

Hotel industry needs qualified labour and capable employees in order to survive the economic potential of the hospitality industry. Employees need to be sent for on going training sessions to ensure continuous quality improvement. The right communication method needs to be instilled within the workforce and around the work culture. Employees who are highly satisfied with communication respond more positively towards motivation components and they are more likely to perform well in their job when they are motivated (Chiang C.F., Jang S, Canter D, and Prince, J., 2008). Therefore, communication should be managed collectively to motivate employees. Employees need to be handled well and management should have a systematic procedure in communicating and ensuring that instructions and decisions are delivered well across the team. When hotel employees are motivated, it leads to the increase in performance of the worker and the hotel, increase of the morale and job satisfaction among the workforce. There would also be less stress within the workforce and work culture.

2.4.2 Lack of Manpower in Human Resource Departments

Campbell and Baldwin (1993) did a study on recruitment difficulties and skills shortage in the labour market and suggested that in many industrialized countries there is a concern that skills shortages and mismatches are appearing in the labour market and that policy makers are aware that recruitment difficulties and skills shortages may reduce the competitiveness of small and large firms.

2.4.3 Lack of Financial Requirements to Operate Training Functions

Blackburn and Hankinson (1989) surveyed training in smaller business and found that low participation in formal training was attributable to its expense which is inappropriate. MacMahon and Murphy (1999) studied on the managerial effectiveness in small enterprises and stated that the expenses include not only the fees, but also its cost in terms of absence from the firm since it involved the cost of productive labour.

2.4.4 Lack of Management's Policy, Leadership, Skills, Knowledge, Attitudes, Expertise

Keep and Mayhew (1999) conducted a study in the leisure sector and stated that the standards of managerial expertise and competence are variables and they are

relatively few organizations that could be said to operate at the leading edge of good practice, in terms of people management policies and practices. Many of the leisure sector organizations are thinly resource and communication and co-ordination between them is often poor.

2.4.5 Lack of Realisation of the Outcome of Training Functions

MacMahon & Murphy (1999) conducted a study on managerial effectiveness in small enterprises and found that training is often perceived as an unaffordable luxury. Training resulting in highly specialised staff was considered inappropriate due to the need for staff with multiple skills to cope with the highly flexible nature of the work. Training is therefore considered costly and a waste of time by some management which made them neglect training functions. Vinten (2000) in his study stated that training was not viewed strategically in the company, it emerged from the business requirements. Training is mostly arranged when there is a need to it. It was not centrally organised. Training was initiated in the event of difficulty in implementing the strategy.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology used to carry out this study was to search for the contributing factors of the improper practice of training functions in selected hotels in Penang, focusing on the topic of what were the “currently observed” contributing factors of the improper practice of training functions and human resource development practices in the industry. The size of the hotel management in the hotel industry (big hotels, medium hotel and small hotels) influences training functions applied in the selected hotels and the outcome differs between hotels. The factors contributing towards training functions, based on the perceptions of the management team of Human Resource Management Department of the selected hotels are attributed to a lot of factors but the main factors are as follows : i) lack of realisation of the importance of training functions, ii) lack of manpower in HR departments, iii) lack of financial requirements to operate training functions, iv) lack of management's policy, leadership, skills, knowledge, attitudes, expertise and v) lack of realisation of the outcome of training functions.

This study involves 44 respondents of the 15 selected hotels in Penang area. This includes the big, medium and small hotels categorised by the number of the hotels staff. Overall, there are about twenty hotels in Penang but the researcher approached seventeen of the hotels in Penang as respondents for this research. However, during the data collection process, the researcher has found out that out of the selected seventeen hotels, only fifteen hotels responded to the researcher's questionnaires. This study used the self-administered questionnaires survey method as a mode of data collection. The survey method was appropriate because

it was less time consuming and inexpensive as compared to one-to-one interview and telephone interview and it also ensured confidentiality. Questionnaires were sent to the specified hotels where the supervisors were selected based on their positions held which was the staff of the human resource management departments.

This study used a specially constructed distributed by hand questionnaire due to the distribution of the sample. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher by using the sample analysis done by Chalofsky and Reinhart (1988) on hrd effectiveness. The variables were changed and suited to the conditions of training in hotels for this study and the questionnaire was then pre-tested. Specifically, this part of the questionnaire gathered the managers / executives / officer's personal attributes and professional demographic information which included the nature of current involvement of training functions, the highest academic qualification, the gender of the supervisors and supervisor's working experiences.

Factors contributing towards the improper practice of training functions comprise measures of the management's perceptions towards the following elements : lack of realisation of the importance of training functions; lack of manpower in HR Departments; lack of financial requirement to operate training functions; lack of management's policy, leadership, skills, knowledge, attitudes, expertise; lack of realisation of the outcome of training functions; lack of realisation of the importance of training functions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Human Resource Management of the selected companies was analysed. The training functions were questioned and the number of HRM staff was queried.

Table 1: Distribution of supervisor's perception on the background of the company's HRM

Training officers organize and design training functions	Frequency	Percent
Yes	20	45.5
No	24	54.5

The functions of the organising and designing of training activities varies within one hotel management to another depending on the type of hotels whether it is a big, medium or small hotel. An amount of 45.5% of the supervisors of the selected hotels agreed that training officers were in charge of organising and designing training functions whereas 54.5% of the supervisors disagreed that these functions were not carried out by the training officers. This was because smaller hotels did not have training officers specifically trained and in charge of training purposes. The task was then carried out by the human resource management staff / officers or the manager or even the department's supervisors themselves.

4.1 Lack of Realisation of the Importance of Training Functions

Training is very much needed in organisations as they are the welcoming introduction for new employees as well as a tool for improvement in their work progress. Training functions enable the staff to be more efficient in delivering their work as it will be a well guided process on how to deliver their daily routines and it is also an alarm that they are always close monitored and this will definitely motivate them to work harder. All the staff agreed as well that training makes staff more efficient in delivering their work. Training function is important to achieve the company's mission as it is considered a procedure of maintaining and developing the company's assets (human resources / manpower) in their progress of work. All the supervisors agreed that training functions is important to the company's mission whereby more than 50 percent of the supervisors strongly agreed to this statement. Service line staff has to be regularly trained as they represent the company's ability in surviving in hotel industry and should always perform their duties splendidly to impress their customers and they also represent the hotel's image and prestige. Only 4.5 percent of the supervisors were uncertain of this statement whereas all the other supervisors agreed that service line staff has to be regularly trained.

Managers are responsible in forming training functions as agreed by all the supervisors except for one. Most of the supervisors were not that certain as to who should take charge of training functions in the hotel management as most of the supervisors, consisting 54.5 percent of them only agreed to the statement and the other 43.2 percent strongly agreed to it. Only 2.3 percent of the supervisors disagreed that managers were involved in the process of coaching and motivating the staff, whereas the others agreed to it. A big majority of 81 percent of the supervisors strongly agreed to the statement. This shows that the supervisors of the selected hotels truly felt that their managers give priorities to their work and the staff performances. All the supervisors agreed that managers are not just in charge of giving orders but also to counsel the staff. The supervisor strongly agreed with a percentage of 79.5 that managers need to understand the staff problem in work where it means that the management needs to be concerned

about their well beings and their difficulties in dealing with work environment. All the other supervisors agreed to the motion as well.

4.2 Lack of Manpower in Human Resource Departments

This is considered the most realised reason to the improper practice of training functions in hotel industry. The supervisors who are all the staff of human resource management agreed to this fault as the most contributing factor to the improper practice of training functions in hotel industry. There is not enough staff in hr department to handle the workload but the result of the analysis differed between big and small hotels. Bigger hotels with larger numbers of human resource management staff tend to disagree with this statement but most of the hotels in Penang hotel industry agreed to this statement as the contributing factor to the lack of training functions in hotel industry. But there were also those that preferred not to answer this question by just putting their uncertainty towards it. 88.6 percent of the supervisors agreed that they either agreed or strongly agreed that they knew their job in their department very well, whereas the other 11.4 percent of them stated that they disagreed that they knew their duties well. This may be due to their workload that made them do everything in the department even though it is not part of their job.

4.3 Lack of Financial Requirement to Operate Training Functions

Training functions are costly as agreed by 61.4% of the supervisors. About 15.9% of the supervisors disagreed that training functions are costly and these supervisors were mostly from the bigger hotels with bigger fund preempted for training purposes for the development of the staff performance and motivation towards work. All the supervisors agreed and strongly agreed that induction training should be an on-going process to ensure that the staffs progress will be well-monitored and the staff will be more motivated to perform better and they will increase their competence in their performance when they realise that their work progress is given recognition and properly guided.

Training experts were invited to conduct training courses in the company as agreed by 75% of the supervisors and strongly agreed by 13.6% of the supervisors. There were also about 11.4% which consisted of 5 supervisors who disagreed with the statement. These were supervisors from staff of smaller hotels where they do not have enough financial standing to invite experts to perform training sessions in their hotels. Training experts were more expensive and it took a longer procedure to get through. This was agreed by a majority of the supervisors. A number of 27.3% of the staff were unsure on whether there was an amount specified for training functions by the management where all the others agreed and strongly agreed to the statement. This showed that there was indeed an amount specified for training functions. The uncertain group was of those who were not aware of training functions and policy applied in their hotel

management. They were from the lower ranking of the management team of the Human Resource Management Departments of the selected hotels.

Hotel industry employed many temporary staff who happened to be students who wish to experience work while waiting for their SPM results. An amount of 52.3% of the supervisors agreed, 15.9% of them strongly agreed as this was a common practice among SPM school leavers who tend to join hotel operational line while waiting for their results to come out. Once they received good grades and offered a place in higher institutions, they would leave hotel industry for good. This has been one of the problems to the staff's turnover in hotels. A group of 20 supervisors agreed and strongly agreed to this statement whereas 12 others disagreed and another 12 of the supervisors were not sure on whether staff turnover can be because of SPM leavers.

4.4 Lack of Management's Policy, Leadership, Skills, Knowledge, Attitudes, Expertise

The company has a management development plan as agreed and strongly agreed by 33 of the supervisors. The other supervisors were not sure of their answers to the statement, might be because they were not personally involved to that job function. All the supervisors agreed and strongly agreed that the company had a training plan (training budget). All the supervisors also agreed that the management was concerned about the staffs' skills and career potential. A number of 29.5% of the supervisors were uncertain whether the company managed the staff well, whereas the other supervisors agreed and strongly agreed to the statement.

Most of the supervisors agreed and strongly agreed that training functions was important for the front-liners as the services provided would not be questioned. This showed that training functions were needed in hotel industry this had been noticed by their management. On-job training activities were regularly conducted and this helped in improvising the staff's skills. The supervisors agreed and strongly agreed to that. Management had problems with the workload as there was a lack of HR staff as agreed by most of the hotels. Bigger hotels had more HR staff to attend to their job functions, this statement had been disagreed by 20.5% of them. A total of 68.2% agreed and 4.5% of the supervisors strongly agreed that management had problems with the workload due to the lack of number of staff.

Bigger hotels had a more structured and computerized system in their work procedure. Therefore, 13.6% of the supervisors disagreed that the management used the manual system in their work procedure. A number of 61.4% of the supervisors agreed, 2.3% strongly agreed whereas 22.7% of them were not quite sure about the work system and procedures questioned. Bigger hotels with a systematic work procedure did not have problems with the workload whereas

hotel management using the manual system faced problems with workload. Most medium and smaller hotels agreed to this.

4.5 Lack of Realisation of the Outcome of Training Functions

Trainers must be able to identify what they need to become experts. This was agreed by 40 of the supervisors whereas the remaining 4 of them disagreed to it. All the supervisors agreed that trainers must understand their tasks, knowledge and skills needed to deliver their duties well. Supervisors also felt that trainers must be able to make good recommendations towards solutions to help staff facing problems. The supervisors also stated that HR Managers must have good relationship with other managers in the organisation and effective HR/HRD Managers would know his supervision and organisation's current condition well. The supervisors also fully agreed that their Human Resource Managers / Department staff had a great influence and networking skills to socialise in the organisation. Most of the supervisors agreed that HR Managers must be able to be close to the other managers to obtain power / status and information needed resources and friendship. A number of 31.8% of the supervisors disagreed that power / status must be obtained by the HR Managers through efforts of trying to be close with other managers.

From the findings obtained, serious consideration should be given to training functions in hotel industry. Research conducted in hospitality and tourism firms of all sizes has discovered that informality and a relatively unsophisticated management style characterise the approach taken towards recruitment and training. Research on recruitment and training in small firms in general has also indicated that an informal approach towards the management of human resources is the norm in these firms (Jameson, 1999). Therefore, from the results and factors contributing to the lack of training functions, it is supported that strong emphasis was not given by the management on the importance of practising training functions in hotel industry as the human resources was not properly guided in their organisations.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Findings suggest that the factors contributing towards training functions practised differ between small, medium and big organisations. Bigger hotels have a more well sorted plan for training functions and the constraints of training functions in these hotels are not big since they have a better financial background and a more developed and strategic human resources plan practised in their Human Resource Departments. Smaller hotels have problems in the finance area, manpower and expertise in the HR Departments and the management's concern towards the developmental aspects of the staff's needs towards career development and the organisation's development. Managers of these organisations are also beginning

to recognise that the skills and commitment of their employees and the quality of their managers will determine the future success of their employees and the quality of their managers will determine the future success of the organisation. Employees' competence is recognised as the most precious resource: therefore investment in training is considered important for the organisation (Khulida, 1999). Results from this study will be able to guide managers to relate to the type of training functions to be applied in their organisations once presented with the results of training functions practised and the faults that arise in their organisations.

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