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Competency Development and Human Resource Management in the Hospitality Industry

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Abstract

This academic paper reports a study on competency development and human resource management in the tourism and hospitality industry. The purpose was to identify an appropriate approach used in employees' competency development in hotels or the hospitality industry, including personnel development strategies and problems or obstacles encountered in the development process. Such identified data were obtained from literature review, followed by its analysis and synthesis. The results of the study pointed to the significance of work competency development of personnel to create good products and deliver quality services. This was to ensure business organizations in the hospitality industry to provide *challenging incentives* and *corresponding compensations* on the basis of work competencies developed by the organizations concerned. Employees with good work competencies can benefit the organizations to remain competitive with their business counterparts. Good incentives, compensation benefits, and welfare can then enhance the quality of work life for personnel. It was concluded that motivation and compensation appeared to serve as two main criteria for organizations to offer to highly competent personnel to help achieve their business operations and goals.

Keywords: *Human resource development, hospitality industry, work competencies, incentives, motivation, compensation benefits*

1. Rationale and Background of the Study

Tourism has been widely recognized for its vital importance to the economy, culture and environment. It also promotes good relations between countries. Tourism is associated with a variety of businesses, leading to economic movements for the improvement of quality of life and society. Today, there are many forms of tourism that are popular, such as agricultural tourism, ecotourism, community tourism and health tourism. This is also the age of elderly tourism and, of course, tourism business operators have to focus on hygiene and health (Aksornpairroj, 2018). The expansion of tourism business has continued to expand worldwide, and there have been guidelines for developing personnel for the tourism and hospitality industry regarding work competencies with increased knowledge and good understanding of the services provided for customers (Chattiwong & Mongkhonvanit, 2017). The development of service personnel in the

tourism business, particularly hotels, usually requires specific training to develop employees into quality personnel (Ngamwachaikit & Khemthong, 2018). Such development of work performances or competencies for executives and service providers is needed for entry into the ASEAN community, for competitiveness of business operations.

Thailand has aspired to take a major role in the ASEAN Community, and its hospitality industry and entrepreneurship need to spur up personnel development to be able to provide products and services as expected by prospective customers. Suwannachote & Lertputtarak (2016) emphasized that human resource management of the hospitality industry be in line with the guidelines for human resource development in the hotel industry, and tackling identified problems or obstacles for practical solutions (Onom, 2016). In taking a step into the ASEAN Economic Community, hotel business operators need to develop and adjust human resource management (Prayoosak, 2016). A development approach is required to empower the personnel of Generation Y (Taveephol, Phalachit & Booncharoen, 2015). Developing personnel for sustainable tourism management of the local area, includes the learning process of personnel development (Sura, 2016). The learning process and knowledge management indicate that personnel in this era need to keep up with modern technology (Plungklang & Naowan, 2017). There is a report on Thailand's human capital development plan to strengthen tourism management in the northeast for entry into the ASEAN Economic Community which includes a link among networks of tourism operators in the Central Northeastern Region (Jitthaisong, Bailee & Pholngam, 2015).

Since human resources in an organization are essential to efficiency and success of that organization, the quality factor of human resources determines organizational growth opportunities, with awareness of possible limitations in the organization's human resources. Onom (2016) mentioned the popular health trend after liberalization under the ASEAN Economic Community with a rapid expansion of the capital for the spa business both at home in Thailand and abroad. Today's labor liberalization is beginning to affect the manufacturing and service sectors of businesses. As known, there has been a competition for personnel and skilled labor in health care. Thailand has planned to develop short-term and long-term human capital development in the spa business to keep pace with its rapid growth (Aksornpairoj, 2018). Executive competency development at the level of middle management is therefore needed for professional personnel in tourism (Suwannachot & Lertputtarak, 2016) and for preparation to enter the ASEAN Community (Ngamwachaikit & Khemthong, 2018).

Characteristics of the level of knowledge and competence of personnel, attitude toward the organization, required skills at work--all are under the scope of human resource management as the key to success in management (Onom, 2016) The main factor in the process of human resource development relies on the vision of the leaders and the given budget. Prayoosak (2016) asserted that cooperation from employees and supportive corporate culture can help facilitate training, particularly employees with the characteristics of Generation Y in the use information technology and media, and their attitudes toward leadership and supervision. It is important to bring about their creativity in products and

services to serve customers well. Hospitality businesses need to develop strategies to handle Generation Y personnel to benefit the organizations concerned.

Taveephol, Phalachit & Booncharoen (2015) and Sura (2017) emphasized personnel development and planning in businesses regarding updated knowledge, and added value to generate income and good economic returns to the community. Business operators need updated knowledge of the business in-depth and ability to identify existing problems or obstacles. Plungklang & Naowan (2017) emphasized acceptance from the tourism markets with skilled personnel and risk factors involved. These points are taken by Thai higher educational institutions to prepare their graduates in tourism and hospitality in moving toward an international community. The importance of such a foreign language as English in tourism businesses is undeniable to all parties involved.

As for the location for tourism and hospitality development, Thailand has put the central northeastern part, consisting of Khon Kaen, Maha Sarakham, Roi Et, and Kalasin as the strategic point to prepare the human capital for the hospitality industry. It is necessary to create practical guidelines to the human capital development plan, followed by feasibility analysis of the connections in the tourism networks in the Central Northeast (Jitthaisong, Bailee & Pholngam, 2015). The tasks involve finding talented personnel and work competency/ service training/ problem-solving skills suitable for the target positions for 70 hotels' operations with the top priority on service (Chattiwong & Mongkhonvanit, 2017).

In this regard, business operators in the tourism and hospitality industry have focused on human resource development guidelines for the hotel and tourism business. They also focus on problems and obstacles to be identified for improvement of the work processes experienced by personnel in operations. Certainly, they aim at more efficient products and services to be delivered up to customers' satisfaction.

2. Objectives

The study was to identify an appropriate approach used in employees' competency development in hotels or the hospitality industry, including personnel development strategies and problems or obstacles encountered in the development process.

3. Scope of Study

The scope of the study dealt with the approaches to human resource development in the hotel and tourism business, and the issues on work competencies, incentives and compensation. The data were obtained from relevant literature review, followed by analysis and synthesis of concepts and major points of concern in the hospitality industry.

4. Literature Review

This section is to review literature pertinent to the focus of the study, particularly to justify the study on competency development and human resource management in the hospitality industry.

4.1 Guidelines for Human Resource Development in the Hospitality Industry

Guidelines for human resource development in the hospitality industry development comprise training for service providers in every position. Knowledge and understanding of the rules and regulations at work are to build confidence in work performance in response to the needs of service providers and users. Job coaching for supervisors, subordinates and peers, together with training procedures on a daily basis deserve a great deal of attention from trainers. Peer coaching at the same level can provide direct experience in the target position with specific duties. In training, the organizations can arrange for tasks on supervising, organizing, and assessing the potential of personnel; this kind of arrangement for training can be treated as additional education after work hours (Chattiwong & Mongkhonvanit, 2017; Ngamwachaikit & Khemthong, 2018).

4.2 Communication and Collaboration Skills

Since English is the language of wider communication in education, business and technology, employees in the hospitality industry need to develop English communication skills. Learning and training can be provided via the English language for trainees to understand how they can obtain new knowledge, share their viewpoints, and communicate well with customers from other cultures. Collaboration between supervisors and subordinates, and colleagues with colleagues supports synthesizing both existing and new knowledge via systematic problem-solving tasks. Onom (2016) asserted that learning from past experiences will result in personnel's abilities to solve problems when encountering the real problem at work. The issues on incentives and compensation, such as salary, service fee, hourly compensation, require skill training and medicare expenses are critical concerns from employees. The organizations remaining well in the service industry need to create people into commitment and feeling as part of the business operations. In this regard, their operations with a clear vision and mission demand cooperation from their employees as service providers to meet the needs of the establishment and especially their clients (Onom, 2016; Prayoonsak (2016).

4.3 Leadership

Improving performance in the organization requires good leadership in creating a friendly working environment conducive to quality services to be delivered by employees (Onom,2016). Creating a good environment means supporting the personnel to be happy both physically and mentally in their workplace, such as providing a place to rest and food and beverages for them. Personnel's involvement in their work allows them to express their opinions and improves collaboration in joint services, resulting in business success as seen in local and foreign customers' satisfaction. Leaders are the key in creating success in an organization. Leaders who value human resources development can help the organization to attain its goals as well as stimulate personnel's awareness of work commitment

(Aksornpairoj, 2018). Therefore, work competency development in the organization largely depends on leadership in raising the level of service to a high quality (Prayoosak, 2016). What are desirable most for employees rest upon enhanced work competencies, incentives and compensation plans for employees as service providers or human assets of the organizations in the tourism or hospitality industry.

4.4 Professional Competence

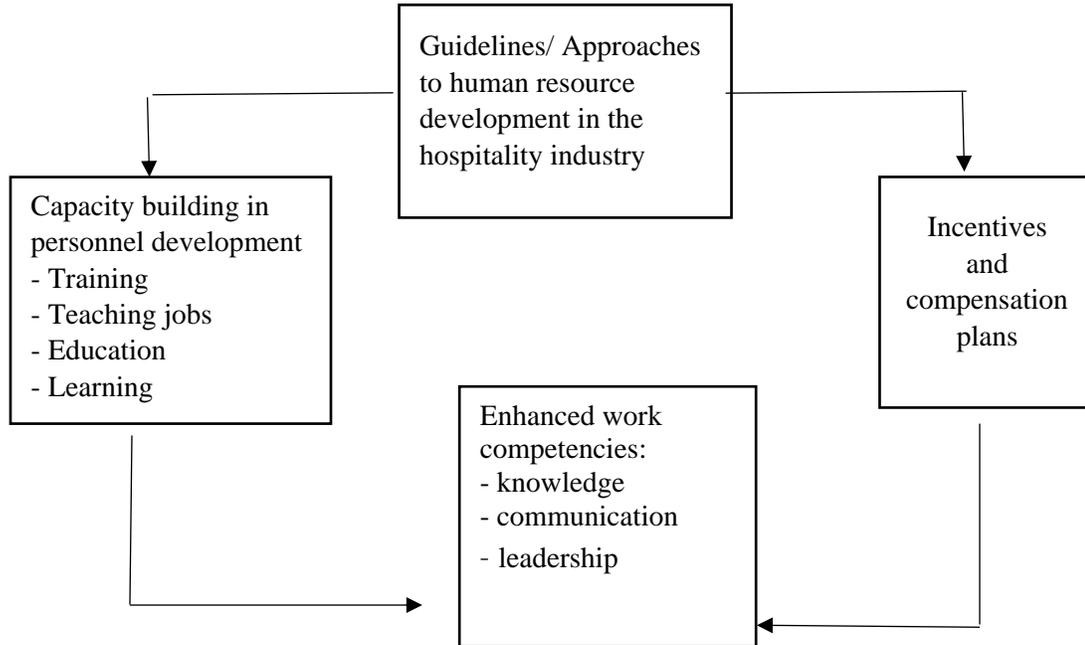
McClelland (1973) pointed out that professional competence and positive attitudes toward work and colleagues make a person successful at work. Chisholm & Ely (1976) also expressed a similar viewpoint derived from their research that professional competencies consist of individual characteristics and behaviors related to skills, knowledge and attitudes. Additionally, Woodall & Winstanley (1998) and Birdir & Pearson (2000) explained that professional competency requires various elements: motivation, personal attributes, individual responses to learning, and individual values and beliefs. Suwannachote & Lertputtarak (2016) also acknowledged those identified elements, particularly enhanced competencies and social/communication skills. Employees who know how to express themselves appropriately in various situations and are able to modify the behavior of expressions to get along with other people, can interact and relate well with customers. Onom (2016) highlighted communication skills in English while Ngamwachaikit & Khemthong (2018) signified positive work attitudes of employees and their abilities to express themselves clearly and persuasively.

4.5 Incentives and Compensations

In order for personnel to achieve the goals set by the organization, they must have the capacity to enhance their work competencies commensurate with incentives and compensation plans. Work competencies and personal characteristics should be in line with the job description and compliance with the expected corporate culture (Suwannachote & Lertputtarak, 2016). Major concerns are with the psychological constructs and consciousness patterns in organizational traditions to create a sense of professionalism in the service industry.

5. Major Concepts in Work Competency Development

The major concepts in work competency development were derived from the literature review analysis and synthesis—yielding concepts in four domains as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Major Concepts in Work Competency Development

6. Methodology

Such identified data were obtained from literature review, followed by its analysis and synthesis. The results from the study pointed to the significance of work competency development for personnel to create good products and deliver quality services.

To obtain the needed data in response to the study's objectives, the author reviewed relevant literature, followed by analysis and synthesis of the major points of concern. The data dealt with human resource development approaches in the hotel and tourism business, the competency evaluation, products and services, incentives and compensation for employees on the basis of individual performances. Incentives and compensation can be used to differentiate workers from competitors in similar business situations and operations. Motivation through support, such as compensation and benefits to improve the quality of life of personnel to work with satisfaction. Incentives and compensation aligned with the organization's objectives and main goals can help create success in staff competency development as well as the business operations concerned.

7. Results of the Study

The results of the study obtained from literature review, followed by analysis and synthesis of concepts in four major domains were summarized in Figure 1 on concepts for work competency development for human resource management in the hotel and hospitality industry. The results pointed to the significance of work competency development of personnel to create good products and deliver effective services. Business organizations can develop personnel in various tasks in the four domains: (1) guidelines/

approaches to human resource development in the hospitality industry, (2) capacity building in personnel development, (3) incentives and compensation plans, and (4) enhanced work competencies. The study also signified the appropriate approach used in employees' competency development in hotels or the hospitality industry, including personnel development strategies and identification of problems or obstacles encountered in the development process.

The hospitality industry needs to provide challenging incentives and corresponding compensations on the basis of work competencies developed by the organizations concerned. Employees with good work competencies can benefit the organizations to remain competitive with their business counterparts. Good incentives, compensation benefits, and welfare can then enhance the quality of work life for personnel. Also important are motivation and compensation/ welfare to serve as two main criteria for organizations to offer to highly competent personnel to help achieve their business operations and goals.

Corporate leaders with good leadership skills can support their subordinates well, coupled with creating a good working environment. With good motivation and attractive compensation, personnel can be enhanced with professional competencies, work skills, updated knowledge, positive attitudes toward work and colleagues, and rational thinking. The organization must develop personnel in accordance with job descriptions and reward them with challenging incentives and good compensation plans in accordance with the mission and goal of the organization.

8. Discussion

The human resource development approaches to work competency development in the hospitality industry accounted for the success of the hospitality industry business sector and effective human capital development plan in tourism, as studied and reported by the earlier researchers Jitthaisong, Bailee & Pholngam (2015) (Prayoosak, 2016). The significance of professional competencies in providing services as well as incentives and compensation plans were also highlighted by Chattiwong & Mongkhonvanit (2017). Sura (2018) noted that personnel's understanding of how to use the business plan for cost and benefit management can help create employees' motivation, and various compensation plans can generate loyalty to the organization.

As reported in this paper, the suitable approach to work competency development under human resource management and other related issues mainly corresponded with findings of other earlier researchers. Specifically, maintaining personnel with enhanced knowledge and ability to work according to the assigned tasks or job descriptions can help enhance service quality of the organization, and this point was supported by Aksornpornroj, (2018). The importance of communication skills and teamwork via human resource management was certainly of prime importance (Ngamwachaikit & Khemthong, 2018). Employees need to develop both knowledge, skills and good work attitude (Onom, 2016). Personnel's potential development program was to increase opportunities for their work progress (Taveephol & Phalachit, 2015; Plungklang & Naowan, 2017). Employees need to build

confidence in managing problems/ obstacles/conflicts that may arise, as mentioned by (Suwannachote & Lertputtarak (2016). After all, employees need to maximize their potential to become valuable assets of the organization.

9. Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the author would like to recommend further research into the following issues: (1) potential development for talents in the organization, and (2) strategies in increasing commitment and loyalty of employees to the organization. In the author's viewpoint after completing the study, the modern organization in the tourism or hospitality industry cannot do without talents to spearhead business operations toward the organization's mission and identified goals. And these can be achieved with collective efforts of employees; therefore, it is the organization to show its commitment to work competency development for their employees to be able to obtain worthwhile reciprocated returns from the well-developed human capital.

10. The Authors

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