

## STAFF TRAINING IN HOSPITALITY SECTOR AS BENEFIT FOR IMPROVED SERVICE QUALITY

Scientific paper

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### **Abstract**

Contemporary hotel industry is facing many challenges which are closely connected to the changes that occur both in the field of tourist demand and tourist supply. The changes refer to quality of services at first place, since the needs of tourists change rapidly towards higher quality and different products. Having in mind the character of the activities in hospitality industry where a direct contact between employees and guests is necessary for providing and realizing the services, the success of service realization and fulfill guests' satisfaction depends the most on the employees.

**Purpose** – of this paper is to present findings from conducted research related to the issue of the importance of staff training in hospitality sector as important management activity for improved service quality.

**Design** – of the research is created to present the advantages of staff training programs and the need for continuing training within hospitality sector in the Republic Macedonia for providing services with higher quality and achieve competitive advantage.

**Methodology** - quantitative and qualitative methods, by implementing theoretical and empirical approach through selected methodological procedures.

**Approach** – is focused on two key areas and questions related to those areas: Segments: two groups of hotels and two groups of interviewees for collecting data related to research problem, and Needs: what is the opinion for benefits from staff training for improved hotel's service quality.

**Findings** – of the research confirmed the importance for appropriate employee structure within the process of providing services. Staff training in hospitality sector is very important for continuous training of currently employed staff, and for new employees, as well. Due to high competition, they need to upgrade their skills, according to the job positions. A scope of training courses includes different programs with wide range of issues that meet industry standards, and can lead to employee' professional development and improved service quality delivering.

**Originality** – this is the first study of its kind related to the issue of staff training in hospitality sector in Republic of Macedonia.

**Keywords** staff training, hospitality sector, service quality, training programs

### **INTRODUCTION**

Service in hospitality sector is an object of exchange within the relations between tourist demand and tourist supply. It can be defined as an activity with main purpose to satisfy the needs of other persons. The "other persons" in hospitality sector are the guests/tourists as clients. Usually the structure of the service is consisted of the following: professionalism, job responsibility, the ways how they welcome guests, how they handle with their demands, needs and wishes, the attitude towards guests while serving them, and all the activities and services that lead to complete satisfaction and

experience<sup>1</sup>. Having in mind the character of the activities in hospitality industry where a direct contact between employees and guests is necessary for providing and realizing the services, the success of service realization and fulfill guests' satisfaction depends the most on human factor i.e. the employees. This implies to the stressed need and importance for appropriate employee structure within the process of providing services.

There are many studies that deal with training staff in different business sectors and industries, and also a research is devoted to the hospitality sector. Main research is done on human resources in the hotel industry by different authors (Armstrong, M., 1992; Dessler, G., 2006; Analoui, F., 2007; Woods, R.H., 2006; Sommerville K. L., 2007), and in Republic Macedonia such data is still almost non-existent (Rakicevic, G, 2003). A research on the issue of staff training is needed at all levels of management for better understanding the nature of hotels' operations and business.

A basic motto to which employees have to keep to is "satisfying the guests' needs". By achieving this motto, the guests will be satisfied, cheerful, in a good mood, and filled with positive experience. In relation, we can ask the following question:  
*How the needs will be fulfilled and how the guests will be satisfied?*

To this question the easiest and most simple answer would be:  
*With service quality.*

But there is another raised question from this answer:  
*What does it means?*

*Service quality cannot be accomplished only by engaging well educated and trained employees. It is more. It should be composed by different sub-services that will lead to guests' positive and unique experience, with the service that will be directly promoted to friends, relatives, business partners and acquaintances for the specific hotel, or resort, restaurant, club. More, the quality of the services doesn't depend only on employees, but on all organizational employee structure.*

For that purpose the management must focus to the choice of employee structure that will suit the best to all job positions. Such approach will ensure creation of appropriate organizational job structure that will be trained and ready for satisfying guests' needs.

In this research we used a combination of different research methods and techniques depend on the data we want to gain for obtaining as more as objective facts. In this research we applied analytical and synthesis methods, induction and deduction, method of description, and comparative research.

Conducting this research understands application of theoretical and empirical research through the following methodological procedures: defining and collection of data, research works and information, collection, revision and analysis of literature, cabinet and field research and processing of primary and secondary data, analysis and interpretation of gained results, content analysis, identify possibilities for future development and defining guidelines for development, and conclusions.

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<sup>1</sup> Nestoroska, I., *Animations in Tourism*, FTU-Ohrid, Mikena-Bitola, 2005.

Quantitative and qualitative methods are used in this research, which is the first study of its kind related to the issue of staff training in hospitality sector in Republic of Macedonia. With aim to explore the problem we selected comprehensive focus groups that have mandate in decision making on higher level of management.

We chose a representative sample of 30% of research problem, and conducted guiding discussion with general and departmental managers in 3 and 4 stars hotels. We created a research design that enables us to approach the problem. Delivered questionnaires have resulted with satisfactory response rate. Content analysis enabled to come to findings and conclusions about the research problem.

### 1. EMPLOYEES - A KEY TO SERVICE QUALITY

The creation of employee structure depends on the following: scope of the hotel capacity, assignment, and orientation towards specific guests segment. In order to achieve service quality, the employees have to be trained and qualified to understand and satisfy the guests' needs. If contrary, they will fail. Therefore, in order to fulfill and achieve these conditions, depending on organizational structure of employees, a very important role play managers and professionals for human resources who apply different techniques and methods towards the improvement and accomplishment of employees' abilities: engagement of appropriate professionals, selection, continuing training, specialization, courses or creating team work programs<sup>2</sup>. By implementing these techniques and methods, and with appropriate communication and dedication to the job position and tasks, working environment and atmosphere will satisfy the best guests' needs. For that purpose, in many organizational structures, managers use different methods that provide services with high quality, which in current conditions of high market competition signify a necessity in orientation of all hotel business sectors.

Figure 1: **Employee' roles in relation with the guests**



Source: Authors' identification of employees' roles in relation with the guest

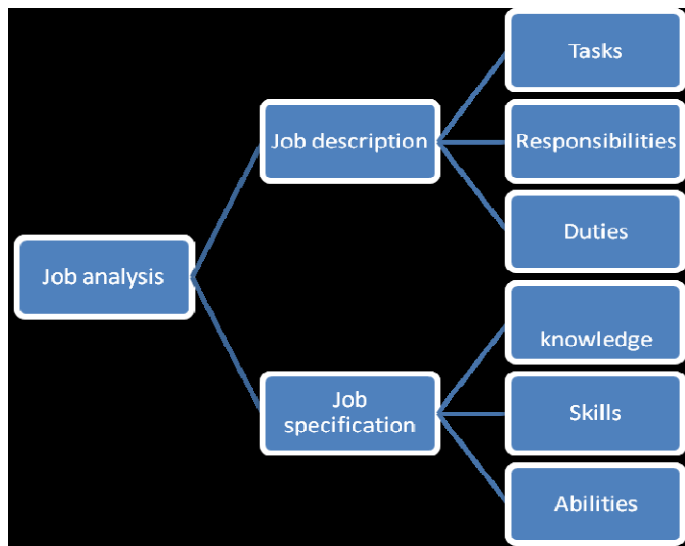
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<sup>2</sup> Cook, R.A., Yale, L.J. and Marqua, J.J., *Tourism-the business of travel*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 2002.

Appropriate employee structure engagement is necessary for all types of job positions and levels. But most important attention has to be paid to those that are directly involved in contact with guests, no matter on job position: whether receptionist, restaurant manager, waiter, chambermaid, sales manager, banquet manager, animator, etc. Service is “care for the guest” and it is a task and duty of every employee who contacts with guests. Hotel employee is a person that takes care of the guests during their stay, who is responsible to enable them to spend their time as much as more comprehend, pleasant, and fulfilled, after which they will leave with feel of satisfaction. Therefore, an employee can appear in different roles that come out of his/her main job task to take care for guests needs, as it is presented in the Figure 1.

Depending on the job position, more or less, every employee takes care to deliver the guests’ services they paid for. As representative of its organization and good host, the employee at same time takes care to deliver the services that will be in best way organized, carefully and professionally composed. Such approach will ensure good impression for guests about the hotel by providing high level of service quality.

Figure 2: Job analysis



Source: Woods, R.H., *Managing hospitality Human Resources*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, USA Educational Institute. American Hotel & Lodging Association, 2006

Employee engagement at different job positions enjoin necessity for processing special knowledge gain through formal education and training, and be a professional and specialist on the job, by providing guests with all needed services and related information about different issues during their stay. In this manner, professionalism and specialism are particularly important for successful job performance for every employee. The success of organization depends on the proper structure of employees who need to have appropriate knowledge, skills and required abilities for specific job

position at the work<sup>3</sup>. These specifications enable them to perform the best their tasks, responsibilities and duties which are described in job analysis by Woods<sup>4</sup> (Figure 2).

## 2. THE ROLE OF STAFF TRAINING FOR IMPROVED SERVICE QUALITY

According to Torres & Adler, a common human resource management cliché states that “people are your best asset”<sup>5</sup>. Arguably an organization’s success or failure will depend in large part on the quality of its talent pool. Recruiting the best talent is important to an organization’s success, especially when it comes to professional and managerial personnel. However, an organization’s human resource can also be a major liability for employers. From an organizational perspective, it is in the “how” a business manages their talent that will account for success or failure.

It should be take into account that customer expectations and their perceptions of service quality vary, so employees should be able to and can evaluate and adapt as best they can to the needs of guests. Besides individual capabilities and commitment of employees to achieve high quality of service, teamwork is very important aspect of this issue. Teamwork in many companies in hospitality industry is an important prerequisite for successes and leadership.

Therefore it is notable that employees are the major pillar in every organizational sector of hospitality industry, because of which evolves the meaning and the importance for their continuing education through training. For improvement of work performances in hospitality, it’s necessary to implement different methods that will contribute in providing high quality of services. Very common is staff training that is used for giving the employees new and advanced knowledge or skills that will assist them to their better job performance.

Staff training concerns implementing effective behavioral interventions which require that all those involved in the intervention are thoroughly knowledgeable about and competent in the use of specific intervention techniques<sup>6</sup>. Staff training is about implementing rules and procedures, to which staff has to be familiar with, before they start working in any organization. Additional formulation is that staff training also shows them how to do the work properly and most effectively. As selection matches a manager or employee with a job, training prepares managers and employees to perform a specific job effectively, that will lead to satisfied guests.

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<sup>3</sup> Woods, R.H., *Managing hospitality Human Resources*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, USA Educational Institute. American Hotel & Lodging Association, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Torres, E. N., & Adler, H., “Hospitality management graduate perceptions of management development practices”, in International CHRIE Conference on Rebuilding Hospitality & Tourism Education, Puerto Rico, USA, 2010, Retrieved from <http://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1433&context=refereed>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.usu.edu/teachall/text/behavior/BEHAVglos.htm>

According to Amirtharaj, B., Cross, K.R. and Vembar, V., training gives employees new skills or knowledge that will assist in their job performance<sup>7</sup>. However, both are used hand-in-hand as employers seek to make their employees more knowledgeable and their organizations more competitive. In order to provide the level of training there are several things that must take place within an organization. Further, the authors argue that training should include evaluations of what skills are needed to perform a job, and also the assessment of the skills employees already have. Therefore, they emphasize that the gap between the two becomes the subject of training. Since an employee is the biggest asset in hospitality industry, building loyalty and keeping him/her motivated is a function of two things among others. By showing a clear career growth path to the employee and training him/her to achieve those meaningful goals supplemented by monetary compensation, and job satisfaction will go a long way to retain them.

A very common question that rises to staff training is related to the main staff training methods.

*What type of training do employees need?*

*How to equip them with the necessary skills that would keep them going through their professional career development?*

Employees need to be trained on the job for better orientation at the beginning as new employee, and then for better performance and organization of their work. As Sommerville says: "training is a process that provides employees with the knowledge and the skills required to operate within the systems and standards set by management."<sup>8</sup> It is dedicated to develop and improve employees' qualities that are related to their knowledge, skills and competences, and it includes techniques for informing, motivating, changing behavior, improving performance and even rewarding.

Staff training contributes to increased productivity of the organization, improved service quality and developed professional knowledge. Therefore training is accepted as important element of human resource management and development, and as a key to motivation of employees to improve their job performance. It can be organized for the following purposes:

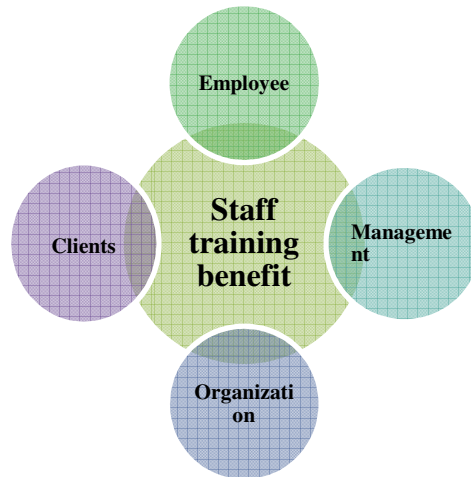
- to help everyone to be more united and to respect team work
- to build stronger ties between managers and operational staff
- to improve professional knowledge and skills that will help employees to meet clients needs with higher level of service quality
- to enhance the capabilities of employees and strengthens their competitive advantage
- to improve the personal characters and professional abilities
- to improve business performance.

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<sup>7</sup> Amirtharaj, B., Cross, K.R. and Vembar, V., "Role of training and development in promoting the growth of hospitality industry", *International Journal of Management (IJM)*, Volume 2, Number 1, Jan-April (2011), pp. 126-133.

<sup>8</sup> Sommerville K., L., *Hospitality Employee Management And Supervision, concepts and practical applications*, New Jersey, John Wiley & Sons, 2007.

Figure 3: Staff training benefit circle



Source: Authors' identification of staff training benefit

Benefits from staff training are not only for employees, but also for management, organization and clients (figure 3). By training, the employees are introduced about the kind of the role their job position plays and its contribution to whole business, which leads to increased employee's job satisfaction and recognition, increased self-confidence for future self-development and achievement of personal and professional goals. During the training, management can identify employees' developed skills, knowledge and capabilities as drivers for their future job promotion or recruitment. Results of staff training are related to improved job performance of employees that leads to improved profitability, and better economic performance of the organization, on one side, and on the other side which is not less important although last mentioned is satisfaction of clients by providing them with quality services. But, these benefits depend on the training program planning, preparation, organization, realization and engagement of trainees.

### 3. ADVANTAGES OF STAFF TRAINING FOR HOSPITALITY SECTOR IN REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

Hospitality as tertiary sector faces a challenge for providing the "right asset", because different from primary and secondary sectors the quality of delivered service depends the most on the participation of employees and their qualifications<sup>9</sup>. Despite the modernization in the process of services providing, still human resources are Number 1 factor in hospitality sector. For that purpose, as a first step that should be done in the process of delivering appropriate service quality is to identify and understand clients' needs. It can be provided through continuous communication with them, constant

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<sup>9</sup> Nestoroska, I., *International Tourism*, FTU-Ohrid, Miken-Bitola, 2006.

communication between managers and operational level employees, and accept their suggestions or remarks.

To satisfy clients, employees should have a positive approach to services, to possess the basic skills, to learn and properly perform their tasks and be flexible in order to meet the different needs and expectations. Therefore, they require proper education and training to meet the standards and policies of operations, resulting with high quality and satisfaction on both sides: the clients and the employees / managers. Because staff training in hospitality sector is with aim to improve service quality by organizing professional training seminars, workshops and other forms and techniques, the main objective of the training is to improve management, employee and organization performance by motivate people to give their best at work.

Hospitality sector in Republic of Macedonia as others service sector is facing with challenges due to current socio-economic environment. Increased tourism performance of the country during last decade has positive impacts on development of hospitality sector that resulted with registered increase in capacities. Such development of hospitality sector during the last decade, with evident 30% increase in total capacities<sup>10</sup> indicate to positive trend. In hospitality sector we can classify hotels, restaurants, pubs, clubs, inns, travel agencies and private accommodation. But, although statistically this is impressive achievement for hospitality sector for such period, as major challenge “on the ground” for this sector is lack of employees with skills and knowledge that will meet clients needs, despite the satisfactory number of employees. Since the number of foreign tourists is increasing from year to year a question related to providing service quality raises more to surface. It is not only the question of number of capacities, but the question is more about the delivered service quality.

Improvisations in the hospitality sector, especially when it comes to foreign tourists are already past, and if think about the future it means that quality service have to be in accordance with international standards for quality. Since a very important element of hospitality sector in developing countries, and in Republic Macedonia as well, is to attract as much as possible foreign visitors, the most appropriate way to achieve this is to provide them with quality of service that will lead to satisfaction. This certainly emphasizes the need for additional training of human resources in hospitality, the need to rebuild already acquired knowledge that must be adapted to today's requirements by tourists, as well as the need for adequate professional education which must come from education institutions and professionals that are inconstant communication with new trends in hospitality worldwide.

Despite of the increased growth of hotel sector in Republic Macedonia within last decade, yet most of managers don't keep up with the evolving changes within this sector. Identification of a need for improved business performance becomes more evident as an issue, and very often is identified as important element for development strategy of hotels. As a result, different programs are and should be implemented by hotels' management and in cooperation with training institutions, government agencies

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<sup>10</sup> “Accommodation capacity in catering trade and services”, *STATISTICAL REVIEW: Transport, tourism and other services*, State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, 2013.



and international organizations<sup>11</sup>. Such programs related to improved hotel business performance include following:

- strategy, concept and positioning
- assessment of hotels
- control and budgeting
- controlling-check
- reorganization and reposition
- marketing and sales
- operational marketing plan
- human recourse management
- pricing policy
- quality management
- mystery-check
- contracts management
- expansion bid
- staff training
- internal restructuring

Staff training is mainly related to new employee' on-the-job training at the company level with limited to basic familiarization of employee with hotel' profile and his/her job responsibility. At departmental level training is provided through observation by departmental managers or shadowing by senior co-workers like an apprentice learning.

But, it is more important to implement staff training for those employees that are currently employed and have work experience. Such training contributes to improvement of job performance through a process of continuing education as very common applied module. Such situation encouraged us to conduct a research by exploring the issues associated to staff training. A quantitative and qualitative research was conducted where guiding discussion was used with general and departmental managers in 3 and 4 stars hotels. In our research design we had two approaches:

- we divided these two groups of interviewees in order to collect data about their opinion for benefits from staff training for improved hotel's service quality.
- we choose 3 and 4 stars hotels in capital City Skopje and in Ohrid Lake Region as representative sample because they have the highest percentage rate of all hotel capacities in the country.

We delivered questionnaires for interview in 17 hotels as representative sample out of 56 (42 - 3 stars hotels and 14 - 4 stars hotels). The structure of interviewees was consisted of General Managers – 17 and Department Managers – 68. We received 71 answered questionnaires that equals to 60.4% response rate.

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<sup>11</sup> Since 1998 EBRD Business Advisory Services (BAS) and the Enterprise Growth Programme (EGP) have been improving the competitiveness and level of sophistication of the MSME sector in Republic Macedonia. As a part of this program During last 5 years it was implemented to several hotels in the capital city of Skopje and Lake Ohrid region as most developed country's tourist destination with staff training for financial department managers, restaurant waiters and bar tenders together with KILIZMA Hotel Consulting.

Time scope of conducted survey was within the period October 21, 2013-December 20, 2013. Structure of questions was grouped in two sections: the first section was comprised of questions related to general background information, job positions, work experience; the second section was comprised of questions about the purposes and goals of the training programs in the hotel and advantages of training programs.

Gained information resulted with general conclusion that both, general and department managers put high emphasize on employees since the nature of business is working with people and for satisfying people needs. Education background is important in relation to job positions. For General Managers very important issue is good working environment with established and well defined relationship between employees and, employees and management. This makes firm basis for ensuring hotel business with established quality of services, and also basis for improved service quality.

Staff training is concerned as very important method of management that delivers benefits for employees at first place and, management and hotel business also. It is seen as practical solution for improving and expanding knowledge of all employees' job positions starting from upper to lower level. On-the-job training is preferred by managers for operational staff by using the method "learning by working" either with senior co-worker supervisor or training consultant on specific issues, after which they get professional certificate. As very important training for most of department managers is "in-house" training by using hotel facilities that limits time spent on training for employees outside the hotel. Outside training is preferred for general and department managers by participating on seminars, workshops or conferences.

As identified problems that can be solved by training that will improve employees' skills are language training, guest relations, sales skills, job safety and cross-training. Namely, in most of the hotels, although it is necessary for hotel employee to speak one or two foreign languages, most of employees don't meet that criterion. Cross-training of staff is seen as important issue for improving the communication and knowledge about other departments that will lead to generally hotel improved service quality.

## **CONCLUSION**

Hospitality sector is not only about providing clients quality services. It is more. And it is about providing services that will be on-time delivered, fulfill with appropriate employee attitude, knowledge, skills and content. Such service can be delivered only if employee structure is chosen appropriate by the management that has responsibility to maintain the quality of its employees. Service quality is in close relation with employees' training, weather on-the-job or outside. Training shouldn't be occasionally, periodically or once in a while. It should be continually with different educational programs that will upgrade skills according to job positions.

Although interviewees approve training as very useful tool from which their business will benefit with improved service quality and increased market competitiveness, yet very little of them practice staff training on continuous basis. Results show that only 28% of all hotels implement staff training on continuous basis. These results lead us to

conclusion that the awareness of continually training of employees in hotels in Republic Macedonia is not on satisfactory level. The situation must change, because it's not enough anymore to have employee structure that is engaged according to job position requirements but more important is to have skilled and trained employee which is definitely a key to service quality.

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