



**FACILITIES MANAGEMENT KNOWLEDGE : SHOULD IT
BE INCLUDED IN TOURISM EDUCATION?**

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Facilities Management Knowledge: Should It Be Included in Tourism Education?

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Abstract

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The tourism industry provides and caters for all types of facilities essentially needed by tourists who come to the Malaysian shore. They spend time and money on local tourism products and use facilities provided for, publicly or privately. First class services would be expected if we are to compete with other tourist destinations in terms of facilities provided within the hospitality industry to ensure they keep coming back to our shores. After all, tourists will only come back if they find that their expectations of our tourism industry are duly met. These facilities need to be managed to ensure that services and products are of the quality expected by the industry. The personnel who manage them need to be equipped with knowledge and skills and this could be achieved if their training introduce the concept of facilities management. Tourism educators could include the FM knowledge to ensure that personnel who handle tourism services and products are provided with basic knowledge so that they will be able to manage facilities systematically. After all, tourism educators are the front liners who could mould future hospitality managers to be aware of the importance of managing facilities within the tourism industry.

One of the major functions of Facilities Management is to ensure that the physical resources remain as an asset to the business and not a liability. In times of high operating costs, increasing competition amongst businesses and rising employees' and customers' expectations, organization should try to maximize the return on their investments in both facilities and human resources, which are the greatest assets of any organization. Buildings, facilities and people all interrelate to the extent that failure in one link of the chain will affect overall performance. Hospitality managers, who will have to manage physical assets belonging to the organization he works with, will have the skills and knowledge in managing these facilities to ensure tourists expectations are met while keeping the operational costs viable.

This paper seeks to highlight the importance of facilities management in the tourism industry and how this knowledge could enhance the overall management skills of future managers in the industry.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry in Malaysia has become one of the most important revenue earners. In the light of the September 11 incident, the tourists profile coming to Malaysia has changed dramatically. The country is receiving tourists made up of citizens of countries whom have not made Malaysia their holiday destination until recently. However, this could be generally considered as having a positive impact on Malaysian tourism and other industries that support the tourism industry.

The tourism industry has also been earmarked to play an important role in the socio-economic development of the country. The Government, through its agencies, has been actively promoting the tourism industry, locally and abroad. The tourism industry in Malaysia is potentially significant in meeting the objectives of development, particularly those associated with income and employment creation and export earnings generation. A range of activities to support these objectives have been and is still being carried out in the form of infrastructure building and hotel upgrading, pioneer status, special touring packages and the expansion of tourists service expertise.

Of late however, there is a major concern regarding the maintenance of services and facilities provided for tourists, be it public amenities as well as privately provided goods and services. The Prime Minister, during the past few months has conveyed his concerns regarding the maintenance mentality or rather the lack of it among Malaysians. Malaysia, spent millions on building world class facilities and services but fall short on maintenance which saw these facilities becoming obsolete after just a few years. During the tenure of the former Prime Minister, he too has chided the Malaysian citizens of the world class facilities but third world mentality.

The question here is, is there any mechanism that could ensure that facilities and tourism products remain in excellent condition years after they were built or provided? Can something be done to ensure international and domestic tourists will keep coming back to enjoy their holidays and vacations and hence ensure that the tourism industry in Malaysia continues to flourish now and in the time to come?

This paper seeks to highlight the concept of facilities management in the tourism industry in Malaysia so that services and facilities will continue to be of significant contribution towards maintaining the flow of tourists into Malaysia and repeat businesses in the future.

2. FACILITIES MANAGEMENT DEFINED

Business organisations may have already considered the distinction between their core business and non-core business (such as cleaning and security) as part of their drive to deliver customer's satisfaction and achieve better value for money. Since the running of an organisation involves complex, co-ordinated process and activities, it is necessary to take an integrated view. Hence, facilities management is seen as creating an environment that is conducive to carrying out the organisation's primary operations, taking an integrated view of services infrastructure and using this to deliver customer's satisfaction and value for money through support for and enhancement of the core business.

The British Institute of Facilities Management defines facilities management as the practice of coordinating the physical workplace with the people and work of an organisation. Facilities management is an integrated approach to operating, maintaining, improving, and adapting the buildings and infrastructure of an organisation in order to create an environment that strongly supports the primary objectives of that organisation (Barret, 1995). Thus it can cover real estate management, financial management, change management, human resources management, health and safety and contract management in addition to building and engineering services maintenance, domestic services and utilities supplies (Atkin & Brooks, 2000).

The International Facilities Management Association (2003) defines FM as "the practice of coordinating the physical workplace with the people and workplace of the organization. It integrates the principle of business administration, architecture and the behavioral and the engineering science".

3. THE NEED FOR FACILITIES MANAGEMENT IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Facilities management (FM) exists to support the core business that is the preliminary goal - seeking activities of the enterprise. The role of FM in facilitating organizational performance, and thereby in providing competitive advantage, is widely acknowledged. Thus, tourism industry also needs facilities management to enhance performance in the industry. The implementation of FM in tourism industries should be focussed on the maintenance issues. The importance of maintaining facilities in developing countries is being stressed much more these days because

many projects, especially tourism facilities such as roads, museum buildings, zoo and many more have failed in the past as a consequence of lack of procedures. In road maintenance the situation is even worse. As the government continues to build the road networks, the previous lack of attention to maintenance has become apparent in the declining state of the existing network. In many cases, investments have to be made into rehabilitating the existing system which has so painstakingly been developed.

In Malaysia, the road network seems to be deteriorating at a faster rate than it has been constructed. Funds for maintenance are generally spent on improvement and emergency works rather than on routine maintenance. According to Edmonds and De Veen (1991), public works are caught in a vicious circle. Budgets for road maintenance are insufficient and are spent on putting the networks into maintenance condition. There remain no funds, however, for routine periodic maintenance, thus the network continues to deteriorate.

At the entrepreneurial level, most tourism businesses are nowadays aware of the need for quality improvement. Few of them, however, emphasise this need in their strategies and even less in developing quality systems in order to improve their performance and satisfy the customer. A great deal of these systems have been established by the bigger tourism companies, such as international hotel chains, multinational tour operator, airlines and other visitors attractors. In contrast, despite the fact that the majority of small tourism enterprises appreciate the importance of quality improvement as a means of sustaining competition, they are mainly concerned with upgrading their facilities or inspecting their products. In most cases, however, they do not develop formal quality systems.

The analysis of initiatives aimed at quality improvement in tourism proves that this issue is not new and has received much attention from both public and private tourism organisations. Various steps have been taken at international and national levels to build quality awareness among the providers of tourism products and services. There are also examples of developing national and regional tourism quality systems.

The quality experts agree that poor quality results either from the lack of quality awareness/ interest or from employing the wrong quality improvement (Wille, 1992).

The previous analysis proves that both public and private tourism organisation, at all levels, recognise the need for quality problems in tourism do not result from lack of quality awareness or interest but from improper systems of quality improvement being implemented. So what is wrong with the existing tourism quality systems?

Owing to the above consideration, a systems theory implemented in FM is to provide a framework for the examination of reasons for current quality problems. A system is defined as an ordered set of interrelated components of FM that affect each other by being part of the system. The components of the system include inputs into the system derived from the environment that are converted into outputs through the use of an appropriate process.

4. DO MANAGERS IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY NEED TO BE TRAINED IN FACILITIES MANAGEMENT? A DISCUSSION

The main issue arising from this is the need to consider during the early phases of tourism development. Developing a product that sits in harmony with the local environment has to be considered. Over the last 15 years, Malaysia has seen a dramatic rise in the number of tourists visiting, from up- market segments right through the back packers undertaking a round the world trip. Malaysia has many differing attractions on offer, and if it wants to remain successful, it needs to be integrated with the high quality product that both considers and fits the local environment. Much Malaysian sees tourism as a quick way to earn a substantial living. It could therefore be concluded that sustainability need to evolve through effective planning, where guideline are set on the breadth and depth of tourism development. Further, locals need to be educated about sustainability in the hope of training people to preserve the product that actually offers them a living.

In reviewing tourism products, one can note that these sometimes have a short life span resulting in a stream of new offerings into the market place. A recent surge in the opening mega malls has seen the shopping principles combined with theme parks. The idea behind such combination is to draw people across state borders even across continents, in search of a unique experience. As most of these complexes are built outside city centres, one can also see benefits in terms of urban rejuvenation, bringing investment and job opportunities to the local community.

Another important issue affecting the future of tourism is that of barriers caused by International laws and regulations. Research conducted by Edgell on politics and tourism notes that many countries are using the industry as a generator of income and employment and that these variables could actually be enhanced further if barriers to international tourism can be reduced or eliminated.

Yet another perspective is, tourism can be used as a catalyst to increase career opportunities and level of wages. This situation may lead countries to follow ad hoc approach to development, where little considerations is given for the long term future and instead, short term goals of employment and economics are sought. Government must take responsibility for maintaining an economic environment conducive to attracting businesses. This might be enhanced by private investment in employees' education and by enabling staff to visit a wide array of tourism locations so as to broaden their development experiences.

5. SUMMARY

Whether facilities management should be part of a manager's training in the tourism industry is very much debateable along with the question whether facilities management can be implemented into the tourism industry, remains to be seen. However, many business organisations involved in the tourism industry have already applied some form of facilities management functions in their business operations and management. Hence, managers could have been making decisions and managing their jobs along the concept of facilities management. What needs to be done further is to look at new ways of managing the tourism business in an integrated manner. This paper seeks to highlight the opportunities of implementing total facilities management in order to see the full benefits to the organisations in the long run while ensuring the people running the show are trained in the same discipline. Hence, we would like to suggest that, a further comprehensive research be carried out within the tourism industry so that some guidelines or framework of the implementation training of total facilities management can be formulated.

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