

Expatriate General Managers' Perception of Hotel Management in Jamaican Four and Five Star Properties An Exploratory Study

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Introduction

For multinationals enterprises, today's competitive global business environment makes expatriate assignments a necessary but sometimes risky proposition (Jack & Stage, 2005). There is a competitive advantage to be gained through expatriate managers who can operate firms effectively. Ozdemir and Cizel (2007) cited Harvey (1996) who contended that only global organizations that staff key positions with skilled expatriate leaders can compete successfully in the global marketplace.

The hotel firm operating in an international context employs international managers for three main reasons. 1. To provide an element of control and coordination in the local operating unit, 2. To provide management development opportunities to senior staff in the organization 3. To facilitate the transfer of skills and knowledge across global borders (Ozdemir & Cizel, 2007). Expatriate managers are conceptualized as those who are not nationals of the country where they are working and are employed because of their specialized operational abilities or due to their knowledge of the employing organization (Pine, 2000). When expatriate managers are assigned to the host country, they are coming into a new business and cultural environment. Adaptation to the new cultural environment in the host country is perceived as a major challenge expatriates face on their international assignments and may lead to ineffectiveness or even business failure (Black, 1988).

Only one study had attempted to look at expatriate hotel managers in a Caribbean context (see Jayawardena & Haywood, 2003). With such scarcity in the literature addressing this issue, a study of this nature is undoubtedly warranted. The purpose of the present exploratory research therefore was to add to the limited research in this area by examining key human resource, and organizational/operational issues and challenges facing expatriate hotel general managers in Jamaica. In addition it is necessary to understand the essential factors they believe to be necessary for success in a Caribbean context. Specifically the following objectives will be explored:

1. How do expatriates view Jamaican hotel worker behaviors compared to workers in other countries?
2. What factors expatriates believe may influence these behaviors
3. To understand the organizational and operational issues expatriates believe pose challenges for hotel operation?
4. To understand the factors expatriates believe are necessary for a successful expatriate assignment in Jamaica?

Literature Review

As international corporate activities increase, the staffing of their organization involves more strategic concerns. However, foreign assignments have many differences, and

dissatisfaction with host country is a known cause of expatriate failure (Mei-Fang, Gwo-Hsiung, & Tzung-I, 2005). Most international hotel corporations employ expatriate general managers who continue to help in professionalizing the hospitality services and management in the Caribbean (Jayawardena & Haywood, 2003). The international manager faces challenges when operating in the Caribbean, which varies from destination to destination, depending on the historic background and ethnic mix of the country.

A study conducted by Carter (1997) showed that managers from different cultures are widely accepted. Jayawardena and Haywood (2003), posited that factors that many influence the behavioral patterns of host populations and their attitudes towards tourists and the hospitality industry include the political landscape, percentage of single parent families, drug trafficking and literacy rate. Jayawardena and Haywood (2003), identified poor environmental management systems, poor return on investment high foreign exchange leakage, low productivity levels, red tape delays and soon come attitude, attracting and retaining good employees and pilferage and thefts as factors that expatriates face working in the Caribbean.

Methodology

This exploratory study employed face to face semi-structured interviews with expatriate general managers of four and five star properties in Negril and Montego Bay, Jamaica. These locations were chosen for site of the research because they have a large collection of 4 and 5 star hotels in the Caribbean, with many of them being managed by expats. The study involved 9 participants who responded to the emails from a purposeful sample of 19 general managers. The interview protocol was semi-structured and comprised three major categories of questions. The first set included demographics, such as countries worked previously and educational background; the second set was related to human resources factors, such as worker motivation, employee service levels, turnover rates, and level of education. The final set of questions aimed to identify organizational and operational challenges such as, inflation and exchange rates, and material shortages. Participating managers were from France, USA, Greece, Belgium, Scotland and Austria and worked in the Jamaican hotel industry from a period of three months to twenty years, and had been general managers from three to fifteen years. The interviews were conducted between May 17 and June 6, 2010 and were recorded to provide accuracy in data analysis.

Results

From preliminary analysis, Jamaicans are seen as extremely hospitable, loyal and has a high team spirit when compared to workers in other countries, it is agreed that Jamaican workers are less skilled. There appear to be a difficulty in attracting qualified workers in hotels. Socio-economic conditions, literacy rates, economic problems, and the lack of opportunities in Jamaica compared to other countries have a great impact on workers attitudes and behavior. Punctuality of Jamaicans was recognized as a grave issue for all the managers which can affect productivity. Inflation, exchange rates, material shortages, language and poor archaic laws and regulations do have some impact on hotel operations. However, it is the inconsistency in quality from workers as well as suppliers of local produce which is challenging. Bureaucratic inefficiencies and red tape created by the political landscape also have great impact on hotels operations. Safety and security were identified as a challenge for expatriates as such the need for more security in hotels compared to other countries.

Flexibility, openness, adjustment to culture, appreciation of the culture of Jamaica adaptability, patience, firmness, fairness, respect for the people being non- authoritarian and funny were seen as ingredients for expatriate success in Jamaica.

Discussion and Implications

Jamaican workers were seen as less skilled, due to the lower educational level and lack of training facility for the industry. Governments and agencies may need to look at providing more training and educational opportunities for industry workers. Attracting qualified workers presented a challenge because of the low levels of salaries in the hospitality industry, as well as low educational and skills levels. Organizations may need to provide more attractive salaries and benefits. Efficiency was seen as a problem, when compared to Europeans for example, Managers may need to look at providing opportunities and strategies to improve worker performance in this area. Lack of punctuality of Jamaican compared to other countries, was a grave issue. Hotels may need to have sanctions in place to ensure conformity to punctuality. Inconsistency in quality from workers as well as suppliers of local produce is very problematic, appropriate standard operating procedures and adherence to these may help to alleviate some of these issues. High bureaucratic inefficiencies and red tape created by the political landscape had a great impact on the business operations, hotels may want to try and find ways to make their operations more efficient, by understanding the operation of the various agencies and see how they can best adapt to their policies.

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