

EXAMINING HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES IN EVENT
MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY ON OPOLO VINEYARDS

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ABSTRACT

EXAMINING HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES IN EVENT MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY ON OPOLO VINEYARDS

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Human resource management is vital to a company's overall success. Many companies overlook the importance and benefits human resources provide, even though it is a crucial element to a company's prosperity. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the best practices of human resource management at Opolo Vineyards. The researcher examined the organization based on an instrument constructed to assess the best practices of human resources. The study found Opolo Vineyards does not effectively utilize their human resource department. Opolo Vineyards needs to focus on implementing a stronger human resource department that provides employees with the necessary fundamentals to be successful.

Keywords: strategic management, human resources, personnel, event management, human resource management

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background of Study

Human resource management (HRM) departments are important assets to successful companies worldwide. With the tremendous growth over the past decade, HRM has made a name for itself and proven that it takes care of more than just the hiring, firing, and dreadful paperwork of a company. Mehndiratta (2009) explained, “The terms ‘human resource management’ and ‘human resources’ have largely replaced the term ‘personnel management’ as a description of the processes involved in managing people in organizations” (p. 81). However, HRM is becoming less about ‘managing people’ and more about inspiring and motivating employees to reach personal and team goals.

With projected growth in years to come, the need for updated HRM strategies and practices is apparent within various industries. Strategic human resource management (SHRM) is a forward thinking approach that allows human resource (HR) managers to plan for improvement and meet the goals of their employees and company. Companies within other industries, such as event management, have chosen to adopt this method. HRM and SHRM are present within the event management industry, but are rarely recognized. Event management companies thrive off of structure, organization, and effective communication. HR departments help event management companies successfully meet their goals and objectives by creating a dynamic and team-oriented atmosphere while encouraging individual growth. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the best practices of human resource management at Opolo Vineyards.

Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: Academic Search Premier, Hospitality and Tourism Complete, and Business Source Premier.

Human resource management (HRM) is defined as the strategic approach to managing an organization's most important asset – their employees (Mehndiratta, 2009). HRM helps develop employees to become more valuable to the company. An organization's biggest supporters are its employees, and arguably the most important component of a company. They are the heart and soul of a company and without them business would not be possible. Ultimately, if corporations are successful at developing and maintaining strong human assets then, logically, the business will succeed as well (Wood, 1999).

The goal of HRM is to help encourage employees within the organization to reach goals and succeed within the business, while managing individuals effectively (Mehndiratta, 2009). The success of a company can be impacted if the human resource (HR) departments are not meeting goals or accurately managing employees. When HR departments are managed properly there is opportunity for growth, innovation, leadership, and competitive advantage within the company. It is important to effectively manage and inspire employees to continuously strive for success and perform to the best of their ability. Most companies would agree that employees are their most important assets. Often times HR managers speculate that in order to show appreciation to

employees, they need to equally invest in every employee (Becker & Huselid, 2006). It is important for a company to invest in employees using various techniques. For example, not all employees are motivated by positive reinforcements and some might appreciate a more straightforward approach.

In today's society, influential business leaders understand that HRM benefits the company's overall financial picture (Suttapong, Srimai, & Pitchayadol, 2014). A strong HR department sets the overall tone for the entire company. Additionally, employees believe that high performance human resource practices (HPHRP) contribute to the company's financial outcome. An organized environment motivates employee behaviors, which in turn produces strong financial performance (Suttapong, Srimai, & Pitchayadol). Examples of HPHRP include: job security, trainings, career opportunities and internal promotions within the company (Suttapong, Srimai, & Pitchayadol). By investing in employees, companies are acknowledging the valuable contribution employees make to the organization. When strategic roles are instilled within a company's HR department, the HPHRP's success increases as well as the productivity and the financial performance (Mitchell, Obeidat & Bray, 2013). Simply put, employees perform at a better level when they are happy and feel appreciated.

Strategy is defined as creating a strong competitive advantage that produces exceptional financial performance (Becker & Huselid, 2006). Competitive advantage motivates employees to work harder to increase the overall productivity of an organization. Becker and Huselid recognized the "notion that organizations can build competitive advantage, and as a result above-average financial performance, based on valuable and inimitable internal resources, offers an appealing rationale for HR's

strategic importance” (p. 900). Strategic planning is imperative when it comes to a company’s HR department. It is the HR manager’s responsibility to strategically build a strong HR team that contains a competitive advantage (Barney & Wright, 1998). No two companies have the exact same HR strategies and their departments should be unique in their own way. It is important for companies to modify and tailor their HR department to the employees and company’s needs. Wood (1999) also revealed:

...the HR system plays a strategic role in ensuring the effective implementation of the organization’s strategy by delivering behaviours that are necessary for its achievement. Secondly, the HR system facilitates the development of the human capital that defines the core competencies that are required to give the organization a sustained competitive advantage based on unique assets. (pp. 376-377)

In order to stay on top of the competition, companies should instill specific strategies to boost productivity and the overall morale.

Today’s economy is filled with chaos, which requires companies to establish unique ways to stand out. It is becoming more critical for HR departments to maintain and develop a substantial competitive advantage (Suttapong, Srimai, & Pitchayadol, 2014). Maintaining a competitive edge among competitors requires creativity and cohesion among company’s employees. A company that maintains a fun and unique culture encompasses a strong competitive advantage that reflects the company’s culture (Barney, 1986). A company’s culture can be the basis to their competitive advantage, and can make a substantial impact on the overall prosperity of a company.

As previously stated, in order for a company to maintain a competitive advantage, their HR team must find practices that allow them to stand out among the competition. An example of this would be following certain actions during the hiring process. Each potential employee offers unique skills and abilities. When organizations hire and

develop a group of talented employees, they combine the employee contributions together creating a strong foundation for the company's competitive advantage (Boxall, 1996). Recruiting employees can be achieved through many different processes. For example, a company can choose to hire externally or internally. If the organization chooses to hire from within, this helps to strengthen the relationship with an employee and also serves as a reward in the form of a promotion (Schuler & Jackson, 1987). Conversely, if the company chooses to externally hire, this can give employees the impression that they are not working hard enough and might hinder their work ethic.

Another way to sustain a strong competitive advantage within a company is through training and providing employees the opportunity to improve and grow. Practitioners in the HR field have discovered that training is essential for an employee's self-development (Mair, 2009). Not only are trainings crucial to the long-term success of a company, but they also allow employees to improve their expertise. Trainings and workshops help to enhance an employee's acquisition of skills and knowledge within the field. By educating employees through various trainings, they develop and sharpen skills needed in their day-to-day tasks. Employees are the largest investment to a company and it would be unwise to waste the potential and talent of each individual (Schuler & Jackson, 1987).

An effective way to enhance a healthy competitive advantage would be to establish a rewards system. Rewards are provided to employees for the following reasons: to increase motivation in the workplace, to encourage employees to reach attainable goals, and to entice them to produce their best work. Employee rewards can include promotions, incentives, recognition and awards (Schuler & Jackson, 1987). Some

examples of recognition could be anything from a thank you note to assigning an employee more responsibility on an important project. Awards could also be tangible, such as prizes or plaques recognizing an employee on their outstanding work in the company. By implementing multiple opportunities to achieve rewards, employees have a greater chance of reaching those achievements and becoming more self-motivated.

Human resource management is not just a part of large corporations or companies; every business worldwide has some form of HRM and applies their own policies and practices to their line of work. Even though HRM is a part of the event management industry and important for implementing events, it is hardly utilized by event specialists around the world (Harris et al, 2001, Saad, 2013). These service-driven companies require organization and strategic planning to enhance their business.

However, not all companies use HR to improve and grow their businesses, and this can ultimately harm them. Despite the fact that there is an obvious need for a strategic management approach in the event management industry, there is a considerable lack of research to support this practice (Quinn, 2013).

Ultimately, HRM is a vital piece of a company's overall development. HRM arguably plays the most important role within an organization, and could be better utilized to increase an organization's full potential (Schuler & Jackson, 1987). The department provides a solid foundation for the rest of the company to rely on. It is important to continuously challenge and stimulate employees through various reward strategies in order to create a healthy bottom line for a company. HRM establishes guidance for an entire organization, but more importantly, and is essential for a company's success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the best practices of human resource management at Opolo Vineyards.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. How is Opolo Vineyards effectively using their human resource department?
2. What processes does Opolo Vineyards use to recruit and hire new staff, and are they effective?
3. What training programs, if any, does Opolo Vineyards provide for their staff and are they effective?

Delimitations

This study was delimited to the following parameters:

1. Information was gathered from insider knowledge gained by the author.
2. Different processes and structures of human resources were analyzed.
3. Data were collected during the winter of 2014.
4. Information for this study was gathered utilizing a best practices instrument.

Chapter 2

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the best practices of human resource management at Opolo Vineyards. This chapter includes the following sections: description of context, description of instrument and description of procedures.

Description of Context

A case study was conducted on the best practices of human resource management at Opolo Vineyards. Located directly in between Los Angeles and San Francisco, Opolo Vineyards can be found on the west side of Paso Robles, California. Paso Robles has become the state's fastest wine growing region, with the American Viticulture Area spreading across 24 miles and reaching over 26,000 vineyard acres (City of Paso Robles, 2014). According to the United States Census Bureau (2010), Paso Robles was recorded to have a population just under 30,000 people, however, the city continues to expand with an average annual growth rate of 1% in 2013 (United States Census Bureau). Opolo Vineyards is one of over 180 wineries in the Paso Robles area (Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance, 2014).

Description of Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study was a best practices matrix developed by the researcher (see Appendix A). The instrument was developed to help the researcher better understand practices within the human resource department at Opolo Vineyards. The

researcher began by listing questions encountered through the review of literature and applied them to the pilot study, which began February 11, 2014 and ended February 13, 2014. Over 15 event management websites were accessed to test the instrument and see if it provided enough information that was needed to successfully evaluate. Subsequently, the results were then analyzed and the researcher made minor adjustments to the matrix instrument, which included adding more qualitative questions. The researcher was employed at Opolo Vineyards during the study and was able to gain first hand knowledge through observations.

Description of Procedure

A case study was conducted on the best practices of human resource management at Opolo Vineyards. The instrument utilized in this study was a best practices matrix developed by the researcher. The research began February 14, 2014 and continued until February 26, 2014. Websites of the same organization were accessed and it was determined that there was not adequate information on the websites; therefore the researcher used knowledge gained while employed at Opolo Vineyards to obtain data. The researcher took careful notes on prior knowledge and new information gained from observations made from various trainings and orientation programs. After organizing the information, the researcher used the matrix instrument to then methodically record the data. Upon carefully documenting the information, the researcher then synthesized the data.

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the best practices of human resource management at Opolo Vineyards. A case study approach was utilized. This chapter includes the following sections: Opolo Vineyards background, hiring processes, employee orientation, professional development, incentives and termination offenses.

Opolo Vineyards Background

Opolo Vineyards is a mid-sized winery that produces over 65,000 cases of wine each year. It is based in the flourishing wine region of Paso Robles, California. Directly located on the west side of Paso Robles, Opolo Vineyards has over 160 acres, which includes a bed and breakfast, event venue, production site and tasting room. Additionally, the organization also has over 200 acres of land on the east side of Paso Robles. With over 180 wineries in the greater Paso Robles region, Opolo Vineyards was one of the first 40 established. Owners Dave Nichols and Rick Quinn purchased the land in Paso Robles in 1997 to fulfill a recreational activity. Opolo Vineyards produces over 30 different varietals of wine each year. In 2014, Opolo Vineyards was awarded one double gold, eight gold and two silver medals for an array of wines produced from 2011 to 2012 at the San Francisco Chronicle Awards.

Currently, Opolo Vineyards has a team of 40 staff members that consist of salary and hourly workers. Employees work in specific divisions, which include vineyard staff, cellar and production staff, and hospitality staff. Each year from August to November,

Opolo Vineyards hires harvest cellar interns to help with production. Over 15 small and large-scale events are produced each year on the property. Smaller events consist of wine club parties and new wine release parties, while larger events include an annual harvest party that hosts over 600 guests. No mission or vision statement for Opolo Vineyards was found during the research process.

Hiring Processes

Although there are three different employee divisions at Opolo Vineyards, the researcher found the hiring process does not vary greatly across groups. Upon submitting an application, each selected applicant is invited to participate in a 30-minute face-to-face interview. The researcher discovered online mediums are used the majority of the time to announce job opportunities. These mediums include websites such as: Mustang Jobs, Winejobs.com, and Craigslist.org. Another channel that is used to post job openings is Wine Business Monthly magazine.

Employee Orientation

Unlike the hiring process, new employee orientations vary across employee groups. The only similarity employee orientations share among the three divisions is an employee handbook that is provided to each new hired employee. The Opolo Vineyards employee handbook outlines company policies, rules, and procedures. New hospitality and cellar employees are also provided with an outline of their position, duties, and expectations in their new role.

Hospitality staff are given a 30-minute overview of the organization's history and a 15-minute lesson about the wines produced by the company. New hospitality employees are also paired up with an experienced staff member to shadow for their first three weeks. Additionally, the researcher discovered that most new hospitality employees do not have prior knowledge of the wine industry.

Both cellar and vineyard staff are given a two-hour safety training during the orientation process. Due to the high physical labor demands of this position, a safety orientation is provided for new employees in order to limit the risk of potential physical injuries while on the job. This orientation outlines how to use heavy machinery and how to prevent physical injuries from occurring.

Professional Development

Opolo Vineyards offers various professional development trainings to employees throughout the company. For hospitality and cellar staff, internal marketing trainings are offered every other Friday to maintain employees knowledge about what is occurring within the organization. In the summer of 2013, a three-day training by Wise Academy was provided to all hospitality staff and some cellar staff. This training educated attendees on various marketing tools that can be used to increase wine sales. The training also provided staff with tips on how to connect with different customers. At the end of the training, each staff member was required to complete a test on the information they learned during the workshop to see if Wise Academy provided adequate information to attendees.

Ving Direct provided a similar training to hospitality staff in January of 2014 to refresh them on the best ways to market and sell wine. This training also informed hospitality staff on how to track their personal wine sales and how to set sales goals. Each hospitality staff member was provided an online account with Ving Direct that can be accessed anywhere. Within each employee's Ving Direct account, there are online trainings provided to help them stay up-to-date on sales techniques and communication styles. Hospitality staff are also required to complete a four-hour online training session through Premier Food Safety to educate them on the proper ways of handling food and beverages. After completing the training, each employee takes a test and becomes certified with a Premier Food Safety license.

During each harvest season, cellar and production staff are provided with hour long hands-on trainings each week to ensure employees and interns are knowledgeable working with equipment such as: a power washer, filtration system, grape crusher, de-stemmer and the bottling line. Further training is also provided to employees and interns whenever new equipment is utilized.

Management has not provided continuous training to current vineyard employees that had been a part of the organization for years and have been performing similar tasks. However, new vineyard staff are provided with a one-hour safety training when they are hired. No formal training program was found for vineyard staff.

Incentives

In addition to training opportunities, Opolo Vineyards provides incentives to employees in the organization to boost the company's overall morale and profit. Each

year, all employees receive a monetary or financial Christmas bonus dependent upon the hours worked and how well they performed throughout the year. Aside from the Christmas bonus, hospitality staff are the only group of employees that are provided with continuous incentive opportunities throughout the year. For each wine club membership a hospitality member receives, they collect a \$15 commission.

Cellar and vineyard staff do not receive financial incentives throughout the year. However, both cellar and vineyard managers provide employees with positive feedback when tasks are completed correctly. Occasionally, appreciation lunches or dinners are provided to cellar and vineyard staff to thank them and show recognition for their hard work.

Termination Offenses

Opolo Vineyards provides a list of immediate termination offenses in the employee handbook. Termination offenses include: drinking on the job, theft or sexual harassment. This list reduces confusion when it comes to terminating an employee. All new hires are also verbally educated on what qualifies as a termination offense within the organization.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Effective human resource management is vital to the overall prosperity and long-term success of a company. This concluding chapter will include the following: a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, limitations, conclusions based on research questions, and implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

Summary

Human resource management (HRM) plays a major role in the success of a company. HRM provides a strong foundation for the entire company to rely on. Using strategic HRM practices to strengthen a company's competitive advantage can help increase profits and motivate employees. Providing effective training programs can reinforce knowledge and skills of employees while creating opportunities and growth. Maintaining exemplary human resource (HR) departments within an organization can lead to happy employees and overall positive company morale.

In March of 2014, a case study of Opolo Vineyards was conducted to assess the use of best practices and areas of improvement within their HR department. The researcher initially began exploring various event management websites through the guidance of the instrument created during the pilot study. Ultimately, inadequate information was discovered in the preliminary research. Therefore, the researcher shifted the focus to an in-depth study of Opolo Vineyards and revised the instrument

accordingly. The instrument consisted of qualitative questions related to HR practices. This approach allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the best practices administered by this organization.

Results from the study revealed that Opolo Vineyards uses multiple strategic practices within their HR department. Due to the organization's numerous employee groupings, different practices are utilized for each group. While there is some overlap in HR practices among groups, most of Opolo Vineyard's practices were specific to the employee divisions.

Discussion

Results from this study showed that Opolo Vineyards implements various strategic HR practices throughout the company. An HR practice that is common among all employee groups is hiring. Regardless of the position, Opolo Vineyards uses similar mediums and practices to promote job openings with the company, such as: Mustang Jobs, Winejobs.com, Craigslist.org and Wine Business Monthly magazine. Potential employees submit an application and if the organization is interested, they will invite the applicant to participate in a 30-minute face-to-face interview. Results showed that Opolo Vineyards does not conduct a background check during their hiring process. Opolo Vineyards should consider implementing a background check on each applicant as a precautionary measure before the organization decides to hire them.

Contrary to Schuler and Jackson's (1987) recommendations, Opolo Vineyards does not always promote employees from within and will often hire externally. Opolo Vineyards should consider promoting employees from within the organization to fulfill

available positions, as this has been identified as a best practice in HR research. By continuing to utilize the current mediums to advertise available jobs, Opolo Vineyards increases the applicant pool and the chances of obtaining talented employees. Furthermore, Opolo Vineyards should continue to utilize the current mediums to advertise available jobs.

Opolo Vineyards provides customized employee orientation programs depending upon the employee's position and duties. Hospitality staff are required to read through the entire employee handbook, engage in a 30-minute overview of the organization, and then encouraged to ask questions before starting their new position. This finding suggests that new hospitality staff are initially provided with a number of tools to be successful within the organization. However, hospitality staff have the highest turnover rate at Opolo Vineyards. This may be due to the fact that most new hospitality staff do not have prior knowledge of the wine industry. In order to decrease the high turnover rate of hospitality employees, Opolo Vineyards should consider implementing a shadowing procedure as part of the interview process to give prospective employees a more comprehensive understanding of day-to-day expectations.

Cellar staff are also required to read the employee handbook and complete a safety orientation that includes a training on how to operate all the equipment that is utilized while working. Vineyard staff also undergo safety training but with different equipment such as agricultural machinery. The results suggest that formal orientation procedures are lacking for both cellar and vineyard staff. Unlike hospitality staff, both cellar and vineyard staff are not required to engage in an overview about the organization. Although the current method seems somewhat successful, Opolo Vineyards

should consider implementing a more formal orientation program that educates all new employees on their position. For example, a two-day orientation would be beneficial for all newly hired cellar and vineyard staff. The orientation should include a more in-depth explanation of the company background as well as a day to shadow coworkers.

The results also indicated that various professional development training programs are offered, and often required for different employee groups at Opolo Vineyards. This demonstrates that the organization believes in their employees and is willing to invest in them. This practice is consistent with Mair's (2009) findings that trainings are essential for an employee's self-development. According to the data, Opolo Vineyards currently provides training programs for both hospitality and cellar staff. However, there were no formal trainings or workshops made available to vineyard staff. Trainings provide employees with the tools to be successful and contribute to self-development. It is important to offer trainings to all employees and provide staff with equal opportunities. Opolo Vineyards should continue to offer numerous trainings and workshops to improve the organization's morale and employee's expertise. Additionally, Opolo Vineyards should create a training program for vineyard staff every three months to refresh their knowledge and strengthen their skills.

Opolo Vineyards uses monetary incentives to encourage hospitality staff to improve company sales and increase wine club memberships. The results suggest that these incentives can create a friendly competition among hospitality employees and motivate them to work harder. Cellar and vineyard staff do not receive financial incentives, however, they occasionally receive employee appreciation lunches or dinners. Providing incentives to employees implies that they are important to the company and

strengthens their loyalty to the organization. Opolo Vineyards should continue the incentive program for hospitality staff while expanding these opportunities to both cellar and vineyard staff.

Although the data demonstrated that termination offenses were explained to each employee through the handbook, the results also indicated that these rules were not always enforced. Although management was often made aware of these termination offenses committed, they decided to address the situation differently rather than terminate the employee. In order to eliminate confusion for all employees, rules and regulations regarding termination should be altered to reflect the true expectations of management.

Despite the importance of these findings, this study had some limitations. Due to the best practices approach, the researcher was initially limited to internet resources during data collection. As HRM strategies are generally not available on various companies' websites, the researcher was limited to gathering inside information from Opolo Vineyards. Finally, the study was limited to a ten-day data collection period. Therefore, limited data was gathered within the small amount of time.

Opolo Vineyards provides appropriate HRM strategies to all employees, regardless of their role or job specifications. The orientation, training and incentive practices currently used by Opolo Vineyards are somewhat effective, but could be improved. The HRM at Opolo Vineyards is established, however, adjustments can be made to improve the overall success and morale within the company.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The orientation procedures used at Opolo Vineyards appear to be consistent overall with many best practices in the human resource field.
2. Ongoing training programs are made available to hospitality and cellar staff.
3. Incentive programs appear to positively impact sales and enhance employee motivation.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Explore filling available positions with current employees rather than hiring externally.
2. Implement a formal orientation process that provides guidance for cellar and vineyard employees.
3. Provide occasional professional development programs to vineyard staff to refresh knowledge, learn new skills, and strengthen personal development.
4. Expand monetary incentives to cellar and vineyard staff.
5. Establish unambiguous termination offenses for all employees.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Instrument

Instrument

1. What recruitment processes are used?
2. What mediums are used to announce jobs?
3. Is there an orientation process for newly hired employees?
4. Are employees provided with handbooks?
5. Are there trainings made available to employees?
6. Are there incentives or rewards available to employees? If so, what are they?
7. Are employees aware of the termination offenses?

Notes: