



International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management

Human resources: a hidden advantage?

Ayse Bas Collins,

Article information:

To cite this document:

Ayse Bas Collins, (2007) "Human resources: a hidden advantage?", International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, Vol. 19 Issue: 1, pp.78-84, <https://doi.org/10.1108/09596110710724189>

Permanent link to this document:

<https://doi.org/10.1108/09596110710724189>

Downloaded on: 21 December 2018, At: 10:25 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 15 other documents.

To copy this document: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

The fulltext of this document has been downloaded 6873 times since 2007*

Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

(2008), "Talent management: A strategy for improving employee recruitment, retention and engagement within hospitality organizations", International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, Vol. 20 Iss 7 pp. 743-757 https://doi.org/10.1108/09596110810899086

(2015), "Social media usage in hotel human resources: recruitment, hiring and communication", International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, Vol. 27 Iss 2 pp. 170-184 https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-05-2013-0194



Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by emerald-srm:145363 []

For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit www.emeraldinsight.com/authors for more information.

About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

*Related content and download information correct at time of download.



Human resources: a hidden advantage?

Ayse Bas Collins

*Department of Tourism and Hotel Management,
School of Applied Technology and Management, Bilkent University,
Ankara, Turkey*

Abstract

Purpose – This study seeks to identify the general characteristics of the profile of staff at five-star hotels, and methods of recruitment, and makes suggestions for improvement in this sector. It is hoped that it will lead hotels to a greater competitive advantage.

Design/methodology/approach – Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect and analyze the data. Comparisons were made with existing data in order to determine trends and characteristics of hotel staff.

Findings – The results show that there is room for staff improvement and improvement in recruitment methods, even within five-star hotels. All hotels, regardless of their rating, should understand their human resources make-up and what needs to be implemented to retain staff.

Practical implications – With these improvements one might better compete for the first time guests and repeat clientele. Other studies should be undertaken on an international basis in order to widen the database.

Originality/value – There are few studies that address these particular issues, yet there is still additional room to expand the study and comparisons that need to be performed. It would be advantageous include hotels of a lesser rating in future studies.

Keywords Tourism, Hospitality services, Human resource management, Competitive advantage

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In today's post-industrial economy, the service sector has increased importance, from the number of those employed to a country's gross domestic product (GDP) (Verma, 2000). Worldwide, the hospitality industry forms the third largest area within the service sector. One in every nine jobs is directly or indirectly related to the hospitality industry (*Executive Handbook*, 2001). In 2005 there was 7.8 percent real growth in travel and tourism, and there is a projected sustained growth of 3.9 percent through 2015 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2005).

The hospitality industry epitomizes the service sector with its myriad types of establishments, both private and public. Hotels are the largest employer in tourism. They have recognized competitive advantage as their single most important goal. Therefore, a firm cannot limit its advantages to tangible assets such as land, capital and labor. The firm needs to address a collection of specific delivery skills, which cannot be imitated by rivals. Only through a never-ending pursuit of competitive advantage can an establishment survive (Amit and Schoemaker, 1993).

In essence hotels are only as good as their staff, which can make or break a company's ability to render services. Five-star hotels are considered the apex of the



industry. It is in these establishments that we expect to find quality and value. Lesser-ranked hotels compare their ability to render comparable services with five-star hotels. If common “international standards” exist to be five-star, how do hotels create their “competitive advantage”? Among all the other suggestions, personnel can be the “competitive advantage” of some hotels. The personnel in five-star hotels should be “the best that money can buy”. We must have a clear understanding of the labor force make-up that comprises this elite portion of the sector.

Collecting data on a work force is difficult not only in developing and underdeveloped countries, but also in developed ones. Most existing data covers very general high-level topics regarding a given sector (e.g. agriculture, industry, construction, and services). The methodology to gather data differs, and therefore cross-study correlation is difficult. Moreover, the industry is in constant flux, so a great deal of data is out of date. When considering the hospitality industry, it is more difficult to obtain data due to its dynamic nature.

The case

This study was conducted to survey the profile of five-star hotel staff and evaluate whether competitive advantage might be derived from the characteristics of this work force. It is hoped that this case study can be used for future comparisons in both Turkey and other countries.

Turkey’s hospitality industry is in its developmental stage and is representative of all factors stated above. With a national work force of approximately 21.5 million, Turkey’s travel and tourism industry makes up 7.7 percent of that number (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2005). By 2020 Turkey is projected to be the fourth most visited Mediterranean tourism destination, and the tourism industry will grow at 20 percent per year over the next ten years. Ultimately, Turkey could potentially carve out 3 percent of the global tourism market. For this reason there is a bright outlook for increased employment opportunities (*Executive Handbook*, 2001). Both core and peripheral workers will benefit from this projected sustained growth.

Throughout Turkey, there were 144 five-star hotels at this time of this study. Forty-two hotels were included in the survey. HR managers were solicited to provide input to the study. Twenty-nine completed the questionnaire (20 percent of all five star hotels).

The questionnaire consisted of closed and open-ended questions covering four areas:

- (1) characteristics of hotels;
- (2) staff profile;
- (3) approaches to employee benefit arrangements and recruitment; and
- (4) problems and suggestions.

The data were analyzed using qualitative (content) and quantitative (descriptive) data analysis methods.

Implementation of the study

It is essential for industries to analyze their competitive advantage and enhance whatever it is that they have to sell at a premium. These advantages can be “things

such as the physical attributes of our properties, their locations, the wide variety of features offered and our rates” (Feiertag, 2005). We tend to fail to look at our staff and place importance on their ability to enhance these advantages.

The study results show (Table I) that the prime factors that stand out in five-star hotels are:

- work force characteristics in terms of education, age and gender, which give them a competitive advantage over their physical and financial situations; and
- human resources management practices.

The staff profile shows a higher level of education within five-star hotels as compared to the entire industry. In Turkey, across the entire hotel industry “46.7 percent (not just in five-star hotels) of the staff has elementary school education. 16.34 percent are high school graduates and 8.7 percent having university degrees” (*Forum*, 1999). Disparity in the total is made up of employees who did not finish elementary school. In comparison, the five-star hotels surveyed had a more highly educated group of personnel: 24 percent had an elementary school education, 38 percent were high-school graduates and 38 percent had higher education degrees. These are striking figures and certainly play a major role in raising the proficiency level of five-star hotels in Turkey.

Operations, with its high physical labor requirement, draws those with less education. Likewise, those departments that require a higher degree of administrative skills draw higher educated employees.

Another “positive” result of the study is high numbers of employees in managerial positions possessing some form of “tourism and hospitality education”. This may well be another feature that defines the quality of service within five-star hotels. Sector-related education certainly enhances the institutions’ ability to better serve their clientele.

Regarding age, the study shows that there is a larger 26-35 year old work force (which combines experience and youth) in the hotels surveyed. From this data it can be seen that the majority of hotel staff were less than 35 years of age. When describing the whole hospitality sector, “The labor force employed in the tourism and hospitality industry has a young and dynamic structure, a low level of education, a seasonal nature and a high mobility” (*Forum*, 1999). It can be seen that education and youth are definite factors that five-star hotels have overcome.

When gender is considered, females make up only 25 percent of the staff in the hotels surveyed. However, in the overall Turkish workforce, females represent only 15 percent (*Forum*, 1999). Similarly, 17.4 percent of the total Turkish hospitality industry staff is female (Tourism Gazette, 2000). Therefore, the ratio of females to males in hotels surveyed was far higher than the overall Turkish workplace. As a comparison with the international hospitality industry female staff represent 50 percent in France, 41 percent in Spain, 46 percent in Italy (Burrell *et al.*, 1997), 49 percent in the USA and 63 percent in the UK (Whellhouse, 1996). Why the lower number of females in Turkey? The answer may be that the numbers decline as females bear children (Riley *et al.*, 2002) in Turkey. Day care has been overlooked as a benefit and should be considered to encourage female employment. Further, there are social stigmas associated with females working in hotels.

There were two other findings of the study:

- (1) the high rate of turnover; and
- (2) ill-defined recruiting practices.

1. Characteristics of hotels	<p>Seventeen part of international chains and 12 independently owned Mean room count 304 Average of 203 employees One employee for every 1.6 rooms Eighty percent of staff full time One percent of staff foreign Largest employee concentration in the operations division</p>
2. Staff profiles	<p><i>Age</i> Largest employee group between 26 and 35 years, followed by 18-25 years <i>Education</i> Majority have more than secondary school degree One fifth have tourism and hotel management education More employees with tourism and hospitality related education as responsibility level increases Mostly English speaking <i>Gender</i> One female for every three males No division had a dominant concentration of female employees Majority with a four-year tourism and hospitality related higher education degree</p>
3. Approaches to recruitment policies and benefit arrangements	<p><i>Recruitment methods:</i> mostly unsolicited walk-in applications, internal transfer and from a sister company <i>Recruitment criteria:</i> experience, foreign language, business ethics, ability to perform in a team culture, vocational knowledge, military service obligations for males <i>Benefit arrangements:</i> in-house training programs, external training programs</p>
4. Problems	<p><i>Employee turnover</i> A large group work only one year before leaving for employment elsewhere Over a nine-year period, loss of nearly 85 percent of their staff For periods of over ten years, employment tends to stabilize until retirement <i>Major reasons for employees quitting</i> Family related matters such as marriage and pregnancy Mandatory military service Acquiring employment elsewhere Change of home location Unsatisfactory salary Disciplinary issues Resumption of education <i>Employees' weaknesses</i> Foreign languages Lack of training and experience Lack of computer skills Lack of vocational knowledge</p>
5. Recommendations to the educational sector	<p>Hotels are more satisfied with employees who have vocational education/training Increased training in HR Improved student perception of the tourism and hospitality industry Sector relevant text books and curriculum Emphasize aspects of EEO law More instructors with sector experience Increased internship periods More sector seminars</p>

Table I.
Summary of the results

These tend to suggest that there is still room for improvement in both hotels and in the education sector that services them.

With a great deal of optimism, individuals make positive evaluations of their ability to gain employment in this industry and be successful. However, the high mobility or turnover rate experienced within the industry is a common problem through out this industry worldwide and results in considerable concern on the part of hotel management. High turnover is detrimental to the establishments, through additional “costs and a loss of sustained knowledge acquisition”. Further, there is the potential for departing employees to take their knowledge to competing companies (Yang and Wan, 2004).

To just say “That’s the way it is” would be wrong. One can only speculate as to the reason for the high turnover in the first year of service. Given the likelihood of family-related matters, military service and the high numbers of younger employees it can be surmised that these three factors collide, and when combined with unrealized dreams of the de-romanticized reality of work requirements, a high turnover or “high mobility” results. The romantic aura associated with the tourism industry attracts many recruits, not all of them suitable. So long as large numbers of personnel determine that they are not suited to the needs of the industry, or that the rewards are not adequate, or that the physical demands are too great, a high rate of attrition will plague this sector.

Over a nine-year period, the hotels studied experienced the loss of nearly 85 percent of their staff. This mirrors the finding of other studies (Rowley and Purcell, 2001). This is a common problem within the whole of the hospitality industry. Those personnel who weather the years eventually form the core group of the organization, but at any given time they form only a small percentage of those working in the hospitality industry (Krakover, 2000). Core employees are the essence of defining and maintaining quality within five-star hotels.

These two factors need to be addressed throughout the industry. They are somewhat linked and were the male/female ratio to be rectified, a reduction in the turnover rate could potentially be realized. This supports suppositions put forth by other studies (Burrell *et al.*, 1997).

Recruitment is an area where there is a failure to match hotels’ needs and the hiring specifications. A company’s recruiting specification should address the perceived weaknesses of its current staff, but this is not the case. The hotels surveyed considered foreign language as a staff weakness; however, it only becomes more important after the recruit becomes an employee. Likewise, computer skills became more important after employment. It was considerably more important that current employees have computer skill than when being recruited. Experience was also more important to current employees than it was during recruitment, as was vocational knowledge. HR stressed the need for their employees to have some form of vocational training.

“Hospitality has been identified consistently as an industry with poor employment practices” (Rowley and Purcell, 2001). For this reason recruitment performed by five-star hotels should exemplify the sector’s highest standards. However, the mismatches between perceived needs of present employees and the recruitment specification for future employees only confirm a poor employment practice.

The recommendations mentioned in the survey were very constructive and addressed specific desires of the sector. Their suggestions regarding promoting

vocational education is a constant theme; increasing internship periods would fill lower levels of the hotel with trained personnel, thus saving the hotel long induction periods. Two suggestions regarding coursework:

- (1) increase HR training;
- (2) subjects such as equal employment opportunity (EEO) laws tend to point out specific needs that management now recognizes as weaknesses in their own education.

HR: a hidden
advantage?

83

Now many Turkish university programs have added these courses to their curriculum.

The potential for foreign assignments was reserved for the more responsible positions; this draws the more talented recruits to apply to five-star hotels. Stand-alone facilities should consider forming alliances with other stand-alone foreign hotels to exchange employees on temporary assignments, thus gaining this advantage as well.

As stated at the beginning, a hotel is only as good as its staff. The hotels in this study are some of the best in Turkey; two are rated within the top 100 in the world, and one of those is even rated number in the top 10 (Travel + Leisure, 2005). They are, as stated, the apexes of the hospitality sector. If other hotels follow their lead they should ultimately take on a competitive advantage.

These businesses exist in an extremely intense and sustained competitive environment (Douglas and Connor, 2003). If any hotel expects to achieve long-term growth and profitability it should adapt itself to the rapidly changing environment, continually develop new sources such as market-based resources, and build strong relationships with its customers, suppliers and employees.

The results show that the enhanced staff profile of five-star hotels may be one of the main factors that creates their “competitive advantage”. It is the responsibility of those who are involved in the industry to ensure that:

- all aspects of the industry, including labor, are adequately researched;
- further studies are undertaken focusing on how to reduce employee turnover;
- misconceptions and false auras surrounding the hotel industry should be dispelled; and
- there is a focus on how to recruit and retain female employees.

There is a bright future for the Turkish hotel industry and with the projected growth, now is the time to correct deficiencies and understand our greatest assets, our human resources.

References

- Amit, R. and Schoemaker, P. (1993), “Strategic assets and organizational rent”, *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 14, pp. 33-46.
- Burrell, J., Manfredi, S., Rollin, H., Price, L. and Stead, L. (1997), “Equal opportunities for female employees in the hospitality industry: a comparison between France, Italy, Spain and the UK”, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 161-79.
- Douglas, L. and Connor, R. (2003), “Attitudes to service quality – the expectation gap”, *Nutrition and Food Science*, Vol. 33 No. 4, pp. 165-72.
- Executive Handbook* (2001), *2001 Year in Turkey: Economy*, Intermedia, Ankara.

-
- Feiertag, H. (2005), "Sales clinic: improve sales by standing out from the crowd", *Hotel & Motel Management*, 18 December.
- Forum (1999), "The Turkish tourist industry: a model success story", *Forum*, Vol. 6 No. 2.
- Krakover, S. (2000), "Partitioning seasonal employment in the hospitality industry", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 21, pp. 461-71.
- Riley, M., Ladkin, A. and Szivas, E. (2002), *Tourism Employment. Analysis and Planning*, Channel View Publications, Clevedon.
- Rowley, G. and Purcell, K. (2001), "As cooks go, she went: is labour churn inevitable?", *Hospitality Management*, Vol. 20, pp. 163-85.
- Tourism Gazette* (2000), "TISK labor force research", available at: www.turizmgazetesi.com
- Travel + Leisure (2005), "World's Best Awards 2005 – top 100 hotels overall", available at: www.travelandleisure.com/worldsbest/results.cfm?cat = hotels
- Verma, R. (2000), "An empirical analysis of management challenges in service factories, service shops, mass services and professional services", *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 8-25.
- Whellhouse, D. (1996), *Managing Human Resources in Hospitality Industry*, The Educational Institute, East Lansing, MI.
- World Travel & Tourism Council (2005), *Turkey: Travel & Tourism – Sowing the Seeds of Growth – The 2005 Travel & Tourism Economic Research*, World Travel & Tourism Council, London.
- Yang, J.T. and Wan, C.S. (2004), "Advancing organizational effectiveness and knowledge management implementation", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 25 No. 5, pp. 593-601.

Corresponding author

Ayse Bas Collins can be contacted at: collins@tourism.bilkent.edu.tr

This article has been cited by:

1. García-LilloFrancisco, Francisco García-Lillo, Claver-CortésEnrique, Enrique Claver-Cortés, Úbeda-GarcíaMercedes, Mercedes Úbeda-García, Marco-LajaraBartolomé, Bartolomé Marco-Lajara, Zaragoza-SáezPatrocinio Carmen, Patrocinio Carmen Zaragoza-Sáez. 2018. Mapping the “intellectual structure” of research on human resources in the “tourism and hospitality management scientific domain”. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 30:3, 1741-1768. [[Abstract](#)] [[Full Text](#)] [[PDF](#)]
2. SanthanamNivethitha, Nivethitha Santhanam, T.J.Kamalanabhan, Kamalanabhan T.J., DyaramLata, Lata Dyaram, ZieglerHans, Hans Ziegler. 2017. Impact of human resource management practices on employee turnover intentions. *Journal of Indian Business Research* 9:3, 212-228. [[Abstract](#)] [[Full Text](#)] [[PDF](#)]
3. Wen-Jung Chang, Jerome M. Katrichis. 2016. A literature review of tourism management (1990–2013): a content analysis perspective. *Current Issues in Tourism* 19:8, 791-823. [[Crossref](#)]
4. Ling Suan Choo. 2016. A Study of the Role of Work Engagement in Promoting Service-Oriented Organizational Citizenship Behavior in the Malaysian Hotel Sector. *Global Business and Organizational Excellence* 35:4, 28-43. [[Crossref](#)]
5. Choo Ling Suan, Aizzat Mohd Nasuridin. 2014. An empirical investigation into the influence of human resource management practices on work engagement: the case of customer-contact employees in Malaysia. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research* 8:3, 345-360. [[Abstract](#)] [[Full Text](#)] [[PDF](#)]
6. Işık U Zeytinoglu, Gözde Yılmaz, Aşkın Keser, Kıvanç Inelmen, Duygu Uygur, Arzu Özsoy. 2013. Job satisfaction, flexible employment and job security among Turkish service sector workers. *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 34:1, 123-144. [[Crossref](#)]
7. Işık U. Zeytinoglu, Aşkın Keser, Gözde Yılmaz, Kıvanç Inelmen, Arzu Özsoy, Duygu Uygur. 2012. Security in a sea of insecurity: job security and intention to stay among service sector employees in Turkey. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 23:13, 2809-2823. [[Crossref](#)]
8. Horng Jeou-Shyan, Hsu Hsuan, Liu Chih-Hsing, Lin Lin, Tsai Chang-Yen. 2011. Competency analysis of top managers in the Taiwanese hotel industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 30:4, 1044-1054. [[Crossref](#)]
9. Lin Lin, Jeou-Shyan Horng, Yi-Chen Chen, Chang-Yen Tsai. 2011. Factors affecting hotel human resource demand in Taiwan. *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 30:2, 312-318. [[Crossref](#)]
10. Ceridwyn King, Daniel C. Funk, Hugh Wilkins. 2011. Bridging the gap: An examination of the relative alignment of hospitality research and industry priorities. *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 30:1, 157-166. [[Crossref](#)]
11. Intan Osman, Theresa C.F. Ho, Maria Carmen Galang. 2011. The relationship between human resource practices and firm performance: an empirical assessment of firms in Malaysia. *Business Strategy Series* 12:1, 41-48. [[Abstract](#)] [[Full Text](#)] [[PDF](#)]
12. Matthew H.T. Yap, Elizabeth M. Ineson. 2010. Hospitality managers' knowledge of HIV and HIV education: an exploratory study. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 22:1, 69-81. [[Abstract](#)] [[Full Text](#)] [[PDF](#)]
13. Amir Shani, Dana V. Tesone. 2010. Have human resource information systems evolved into internal e-commerce?. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes* 2:1, 30-48. [[Abstract](#)] [[Full Text](#)] [[PDF](#)]

14. Margaret Deery. 2008. Talent management, work-life balance and retention strategies. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 20:7, 792-806. [[Abstract](#)] [[Full Text](#)] [[PDF](#)]
15. Denver E. Severt, Catherine Curtis. Human resources management and a service culture 115-133. [[Crossref](#)]