

SKILLS FOR TOURIST SERVICES

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Abstract:

Tourism is traditionally seen as a labour intensive industry, which employs large numbers of labour with relatively low levels of human capital. Tourism employment encompasses employment in such diverse sectors as accommodation, catering, attractions, airlines, souvenir shops, tour operation and travel agencies, transportation and so on. The different sectors of tourism are associated with wide range of occupations with diversity in human capital requirements.

The success of tourist destinations is strongly influenced by the quality of their human resources. An important part of the tourist experience comes from the human element, the quality of service, the attitude, responsiveness and helpfulness of the staff adds value to the whole tourist product.

Only competent and motivated employees can deliver high-quality tourism service and achieve competitive advantage for their firms and tourist destinations.

According to these facts, our paper will examine the major characteristics of tourism employment. It will also present a direct marketing research in a travel agency regarding the level of performance for the agency employees. It will study the relationship between the performance of the travel agency and the skills of its employees. Finally, some conclusions and practical solution will be presented with the purpose of raising the level of the human resource abilities and performance.

Key words: tourism, employment, skills, marketing, research

JEL Classification: L83, O14

1. Introduction

First the tourism progress presumes to insure the quality services. Of course, the material groundwork quality of the tourism activity is necessary to achieve this objective but only the competence, education and the personnel's passion for tourism constitute the total quality of the tourist product. Otherwise, in every field the investment realised for training and breaking-through the personnel constitute the main key thereby the companies are successful [Pender, (2005)]. The experience shows that where the tourism services are provided by trained, educated, respectful and specialized personnel the tourist offer is more demanded and it can obtain the custom fidelity [Baum, (2007)]. On vacation or in the case of a business travel, people appreciate a lot their receptivity to solicitations, the simplicity and the speed they check-in with at the hotel, the attendance up to the room, the luggage transportation, the publicity of the services offered and the presentation of the services from the room. In these conditions, the tourism personnel have to adapt to the customers' requires [Constantinescu, (2008)].

The mistakes, the oversights and the lack of politeness in tourism can effect in important financial loss to any tourism unit. More and more, it is admitted the fact that all the prosperity force of a tourism unit comes from the personnel's behaviour [Leslie, Russell, (2006)]. Therefore when a tourist product is conceived it is necessary to assure the training and the breaking-through of the personnel, including the organizing measures which define the recruiting policy, the preparation and the breaking-through of the personnel, the systems of the employees continuance, the solutions for the social problems, the control and the inspection of the tourism services offered.

2. The characteristics of the tourism personnel

According to The World Travel and Tourism Council, the contribution of the Travel and Tourism economy to total employment is expected to rise from 238,277,000 jobs in 2008, 8.4% of total employment, or 1 in every 11.9 jobs to 296,252,000 jobs, 9.2% of total employment or in 1 in every 10.8 jobs by 2018. Regarding Romania, according to The World Travel and Tourism Council, the contribution of the Travel and Tourism economy to total employment is expected to rise from 303,932 in 2008, to 376,428 by 2018 [Tourism Highlights, (2007)].

For characterizing the work force from tourism, together with the quantitative evolutions, the structural mutation has an important significance. The particularity of the tourism activity and its complexity are found in the multitude approach ways of the personnel structure.

The most common way of grouping the tourism workers is to fulfil the function that can be associated with an activity division, with the importance and the training level.

Concerning Romania, regarding the activity sector, we can talk about personnel engaged in hotels industry (45%), food industry (35%), tourism agencies (10%), tourism administration (7%) and other sectors of the tourism industry (3%) as in Figure1. [Lupu, (2005)]:

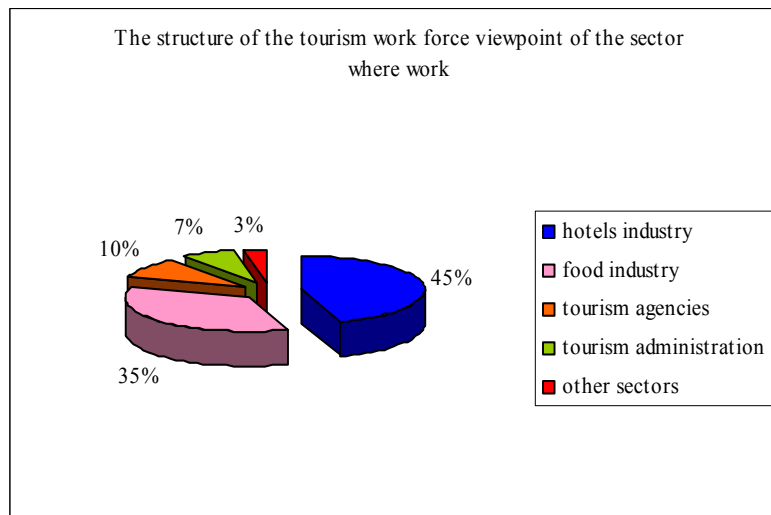


Figure 1. The structure of the tourism work force viewpoint of the sector where work

As you can observe the hotel and restaurant industries offer the most work places for the tourism personnel (about 80%). The reason why this is happening is because of the entrance of the biggest hotel chains such as Marriott, ACCOR, Howard-Johnson, and Ramada who need a lot of work force in our country.

The tourism agencies have known an emphatic development after the 90^{'s}, many businessmen starting an activity in this field.

Concerning the tourism administration, in our country the tourism activity is managed by the Ministry of Tourism which has five activity fields: vocational formation, strategy and programme, tourism promotion, international relations, licensing and controlling.

In the other sectors of the tourism industry we can mention the persons hired in the cultural-sportive activities, leisure and entertaining.

If we were to represent it in a grid of functions associated with the training level, the structure of the personnel from the point of view of vocational training would look like this (see the figure no.2) [Stănciulescu, Marin-Pantelescu, (2008)]:

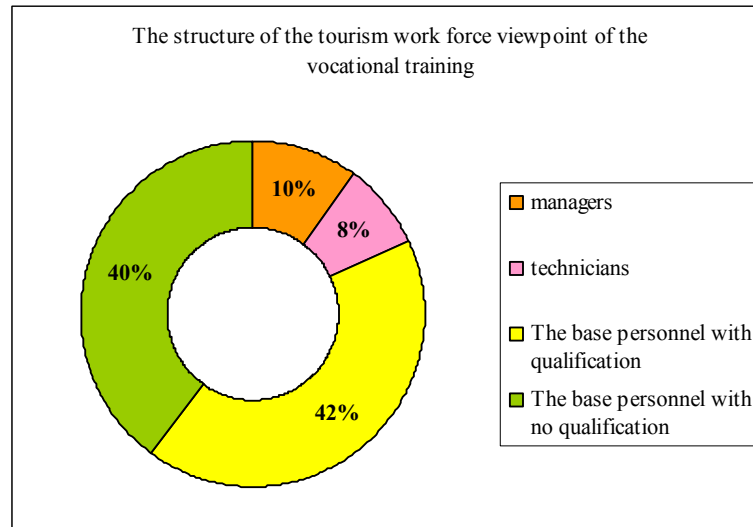


Figure 2. Structure of the personnel from the point of view of vocational training

The leading departments with superior knowledge – director, second director are only 10% of the total tourism personnel. This fact it is due to the big hotel chains that come with their own management and know-how which is used in our country.

The expert technicians that graduated of the postgraduate-schools, colleges and other forms of trainings represent only 8% of the total of the work force. At this chapter our country suffers the most, because the best expert technicians are going to other countries for a well paid job and a better standard of living.

The base personnel who has a middle and below average speciality qualification represents 42% of the total work force and the labourer base personnel with no qualification represents 40% of the total work force. It is noticed a lack of highly trained personnel due to the reduced investments for the training of the work force, due to the low payment and the seasonality of the tourism activity in our country which make the ones who are well trained to leave in foreign countries where they can develop a permanent tourism activity.

The professions from tourism, especially the vocations from the hotel field have *certain characteristics*, for example:

- *superior consumption of alive force* comparing with other economic branches; the necessary work ratio to product item is one of the highest/that suppose an important number of employees and it leads to a more reduced productivity; this situation is due to the fact that automation and mechanization have a limited sphere of applicability;
- *The big mobility of the work force*, seasonal activity leading to the fluctuation of the work force, that requires the use of the extra personnel when the tourism activity is intense;
- *Counter-time work schedule* compared to the usual work schedule (week-ends, official holidays, and personal holidays) brings about big difficulties in recruiting workforce, especially young one;
- *the wide dimension of a work day*, meaning that work in tourism assumes hiring the whole available time per day, effecting negative consequences on the familiar and the social plan;
- *Physical and nervous tiredness*, in the conglomerate periods with a lot of tourists at the peak season;
- *Psychological constraints*, meaning that the personnel who get in direct contact with the tourists has to have self control, good mood and patience;
- *a relatively high and complex level of training*, close to the one of the customers, especially for the employees who get in direct contact with the tourists (knowledge of one of the international languages to be able to provide useful information and a civilized behaviour);
- *High moral and material liability*, by involving the tourism employees in the process of serving the customers; material liability is determined by the material values that the employees take

care of and manage, to which we add the liability for the tourists' assets; moral liability refers to the quality of services or to the degree of satisfying the clients' needs, to the correct drawing up of the bill and keeping confidentiality concerning the clients.

All these characteristics of the tourism vocations have an important role in the recruiting and the hiring process as in the professional development process, too.

3. The tourism personnel requires

The tourism activity assumes a direct and continuous contact between the tourism personnel and the customers. That is why a very important constituent of the quality of the tourism services represents the personnel behaviour that creates the satisfaction and the fullness of the customer.

At the base of the professional behaviour of the tourism workers there are their personal qualities. This way in condition to be a great worker in tourism a person has to fulfil the next requires:

I. Physique inquires:

- Agreeable appearance with harmonious proportions between the parts of the body;
- Physical robust build;
- The gesture and movement harmony;
- Workmanship;
- Good articulation, pleasant voice;
- Good vision, perfect hearing, the sense of smelling;
- Resistance at physical effort, especially orthostatic;
- Healthy organism;

II. Intellectual inquires:

- Active capacity of leasing and understanding;
- Analysis and summarize capacity;
- The facility in assimilation the information;
- Good memory;
- Creative imagination;
- An easy mode of expression.

III. Training inquires:

- Professional qualification;
- General culture;
- A rich, correctly and proper vocabulary;
- PC knowledge;
- Foreign language knowledge.

IV. Psychological inquires:

- Observation spirit;
- Spontaneity;
- The capacity of working in stress conditions;
- Concentrating power and distributive attention;
- Sociability;
- Emotional stability;
- Calm, patience, tactful.

V. Moral inquires:

- Honesty, correctness;
- Responsibility;
- Politeness;
- Discretion;
- Loyalty;
- Punctuality;
- Self respect and to the others.

Depending on the specific of the activity *certain requests* are more important. For example:

↳ For *the reception chief*: the sense of managing, initiative, power of decision, and leader talent (next to the other specific qualities requested for reception workers);

↪ For *the receptionist*: communication abilities, emotional equilibrium, commercial spirit, intuition, dynamism, efficiency.

↪ For *the reservation worker*: very good knowledge of the hotel facilities and of the services offered, attention, rigour, communication abilities, efficiency, seriousness, responsibility;

↪ For *the pay office*: honesty, correctness, responsibility, attention, precision, rigour.

↪ For *the luggage man*: impressive and good looking appearance, a good physical condition, visual memory, watchfulness.

↪ For *the telephonist*: communication abilities, knowledge of the telephone links with the hotel departments, pleasant vocal timbre, and discretion.

↪ For *the chambermaid*: housekeeping, manual abilities, very good sight, correctness, discretion, honesty, distributive attention, good memory.

↪ For *the governess*: above the specific qualities for the subordinated personnel, managing spirit, methodical, leader talent, good taste, responsibility.

↪ For *the waiter*: good physical presence, elegance, commercial spirit, observation spirit, very good memory, robust, patience, calm, inclination for customers working, courtesy, the sense of sight and hearing very well developed.

↪ In addition for the *quartering director*, the *dining room chief*: leading capacity, rigour, responsibility, leader talent.

↪ For *the cook*: good taste, a very well developed sense of smell, creativity, artistic sense, care for hygiene, neatness, responsibility.

↪ In addition for *the chef cook*: managing abilities, leading

Considering these inquiries, the tourism personnel will be able to make the tourist to feel better and earn his trust. Further he will develop a performance in the tourism activity with important earnings.

4. Case study: The relation between the tourism personnel and the performance of the tourism activity

The direct marketing research took place in Bucharest, between 1st of March – the 30th of April 2008, on a sample of 16 tourism agencies of tour-operators with close dimensions concerning the total assets and the number of the employees. The tourism agencies personnel were estimated, by the aspect of the professional characteristics, using the *professional graph of the tourism worker* (figure no.3) [Liu, Wall, (2006)].

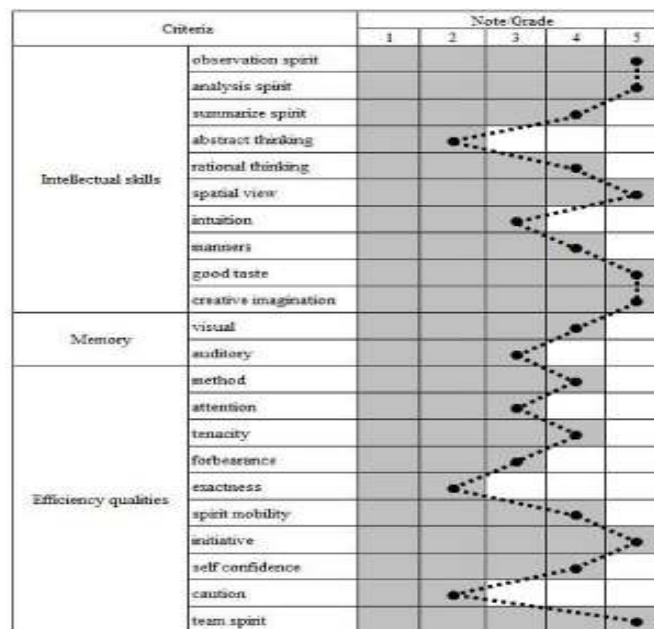


Figure 3. The professional graph of the tourism worker

The research results have shown that as part of the 9 tourism agencies the personnel characterises and the professional graph had a matching percentage of 96. At one criterion “*spatial view*” it was registered a score of 3 instead of 5 as it was required by the professional graph. The investigated travel agencies are in the table below and the 9 travel agencies that are corresponded to the professional graph are Atlantic Tour, Christian Tour, **Eximtur**, **Happy Tour**, J’info Tours, Jeka Turism, Marshall Tourism, **Paralela 45** and Romantic Travel.

Table 1. The market share of the investigated travel agencies

<i>Nr.</i>	<i>Investigated travel agencies</i>	<i>Market share %</i>
1	Ali Baba Tour	7,3
2	Atlantic Tour	5,1
3	Big Travel	4,9
4	Christian Tour	6,3
5	Eximtur	10,1
6	Happy Tour	12,4
7	Inter Tour Voyage	3,4
8	J’info Tours	9,8
9	Jeka Turism	1,2
10	Kartago Tour	1,3
11	Marshall Tourism	8,8
12	Milenium Tour	3,7
13	Omnia Turism	4,3
14	Paralela 45	14,5
15	Romantic Travel	5,1
16	Sind Romania	1,8
		100

The tourism agencies were investigated to the viewpoint of the turnover performance realised in April and May in 2008. Among the 9 tourism agencies it is observed a rise of the turnover from a month to another; otherwise the other tourism agencies register no winnings.

The *Paralela 45* travel agency had a turnover of *52 million euro* in 2008, becoming the leader of the Romanian travel agencies.

The second place on the Romanian travel agencies market is occupied by *Happy Tour* travel agency who registered in 2008 a turnover of *51 million euro*, with 5,5% less that the previsions made by their marketing department during the year .

The *Eximtur* travel agency is located on the third place in our top with a turnover of *40 million euro*.

The interview with the travel agencies personnel reviewed that customers are always asking for details, that they preferred travelling to destinations closer to home, more accessible and visiting friends and relatives rather than staying in a resort hotel. As a cause of the economic crisis the decline in average length of stay, as well expenditure is projected to be more pronounced than the decline in overall volume.

The travel agencies market place in Romania was expected to rise in 2008 with 20% (at the time we made the research), and to reach *800 million euro*.

Most of the travel agency managers sustained the fact that their employees are collaborating very good with customers and the customer relation management plan is extremely useful for them to gain more clients each year.

According to our research results we conclude with the fact that it is a direct and strong relation between the tourism personnel characterises and the performances of the tourism agencies.

5. Conclusions

The tourism firms have the objective of increasing the long time prosperity and this is why they have to pay special attention to the preparing of the human resources, especially the particular activity

abilities from tourism that will assure the professionalism of the future services. The differences that exist between the tourism companies are caused by their employees and the competition is not taking place only on the tourism products market, it starts with the work force market where the companies are in competition for their human resources.

In Romania the tourism has the potential to create work places at all of the society and economy levels, from the bar's personnel, chambermaid in hotels, guides, up to the top management in tourism. The tourism is intensive in work and it has to be headed to the quality, this way the sector would be competitive and productive. For all that, many times in our country the tourism is being seen as the last resource when it comes to pick a carrier because of the low salary, the demands for the personnel and the characteristics of the tourism work.

Considering that „politeness does not cost anything but buys everything”, the personnel working in tourism should show more kindness, correctness and understanding towards the clients. Only in this way can the clients be made loyal, which leads to increased performances in tourism in the future.

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