

SPECIFICATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE HOTEL MANAGERS : VIEW OF IZMIR HOTELS' MANAGERS

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ABSTRACT

Hospitality industry is one of the most profitable industries with a high potential for increase, thus being a hospitality manager is one of the most trendy and prestigious jobs of today. It is also a challenging job since, being an effective one is quite complex due to recorded industrial higher heart burn effects, rapid industrial changes in demand, constant trends and severe industrial competition. Due to its' specific, yet, challenging and ever changing characteristics of this job title, it is important to realize and accomplish the necessities of being an effective and successful hotel manager. Due to this fact, the study emphasizes on necessities of effective hotel management from the perspective of strategic hotel managers applications and point of views on the topic, trying to further improve the topic with their suggestions. The study consists of two parts; a theoretical background to support the practical research conducted by a qualitative research method with the scope consisting of 4 and 5 star hotel managers of Izmir destination.

Keywords: hotel management, effective hospitality, hotel management trends, hotel management skills, successful hospitality

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INTRODUCTION

Hospitality is one of the most profitable global industries which has been constantly increasing and improving in both qualitative and quantitative aspects. Since tourism has shown a stable growth rate for the last 30 years, it has a positive impact for hotel room demands, also. Thus, figures and studies indicate that international tourism revenues and international tourist numbers will continue to increase in 2012-2017 period, demand mainly concentrating from emerging markets (Euromonitor International, 2013) and international tourist arrivals are predicted to grow 3.3% a year from 2010 to 2030 to reach 1.8 billion by 2030 according to UNWTO (2013). Ernst & Young's study (2013) on Global Hospitality Insights mentions that "regardless of global economic risks and uncertainties; lodging fundamentals in much of the world continue to strengthen, and many investors anticipate hotel values will either remain stable or increase".

Since hospitality and tourism has been a highly profitable industry with a considerable growth rate for the last thirty years (ITB, 2010), the competition among tourism destinations in macro sense and tourism establishments in micro sense has become incredibly intense, which in turn leads to necessary application of specifically designed competitive indexes. For macro aspects, there are some available popular indexes, like The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) (WEF, 2013), but for measurement of effectiveness and competitive aspects of micro issues like hotels and other tourism establishments, indexing is even more complicated, bringing further challenges to hospitality managers.

1. Hospitality Management

In social sciences, strict definitions, rigid conclusions and quantitative evidence may not be easily derived for subjective concepts like management, since it covers many components. On the contrary, it was very briefly defined by some authors as "the art of getting things done through people", although the successful end result needs existence and application of various skills and abilities like; flexibility, cognitive skills, creativeness, tough mindedness, motivational skills, social skills, technological knowledge, communicational ability, personal skills, language skills, leadership traits, finalized by enormous effort and energy (Koontz, 1961; Pascale, 1984; Axelrod, 2004; Bossidy & Charan, 2011; Garwin, 2012). Furthermore, in their research Van and Ernst (2005) mentioned that for effective and efficient results, it is important not to only get things done but to get the right things done, which requires not only social skills but design skills and knowledge management ability, as well. Management is also defined "as the process of planning, organizing, leading and controlling the work of organization members and of using all available organizational resources to reach stated organizational goals" (Chong, 1997). In the same manner, a manager is the person who is in charge

of an organization (hotel, restaurant, etc.) or of one or more of its subsidiary units (like food & beverage director, head housekeeper, etc.) (Lane & Hartesvelt).

Management definitions indicate that managers face many challenges and should obtain many qualitative and quantitative skills in order to suitably full fill the positions. When hotel managers are taken into account, it becomes clear that their jobs are even more complicated and challenging, since, it also requires cultural diversification issues regarding both employees and guests. Since hotels are “hosts” to the world they are very vulnerable to and affected by social trends and tech trends while trying to serve a friendly feel at home atmosphere to their guests.

Hospitality management is specially complicated since it is a non-stop service industry serving to customers with emotional purchasing behavior causing hotel managers having higher burn out effects (almost seven times more than other industries managers) (Gee, 1994). Hotel managers, also facing high stress levels and experiencing complexity in forecasting and decision making activities. Years of research on hospitality management topic indicates that hospitality managers should obtain specific requirements in addition to the ones needed for management in general (Goodall & Ashworth, 1988; Valachis, 2003; Walker, 2004; Rees and Porter, 2008)

Hospitality managers and expatriates operating in international hotels or foreign environments are also expected to have knowledge on norms as principles and practices for various social, geographic and cultural environments. Thus relying on this unique knowledge, they are expected to act accordingly and adapt different situations taking into consideration the different power distance and individualism index issues, cultural differences and barriers.

International guests have varying expectations also, and their perceptions on hotel’s service quality is effected by their own cultural perspectives and travel habits with respect to accommodations, amenities, food and beverages, service, and – most of all – hospitality service style. The concept of hospitality management may be universal, but its’ efficient and effective application varies from culture to culture, from one customer segment to another. In literature, six fundamental patterns of cultural differences effecting hospitality managers’ applications efficiency and effectiveness are stated as (Gee, 1994; Pirnar, 2005; Clarke and Chen, 2007):

- Different verbal and non-verbal communication styles, various language skills
- Various and sometimes opposing approaches and attitudes towards conflict and crisis occurrence and resolution
- Different approaches to completing tasks, employing new techniques like benchmarking and employing effective managerial methods like time management
- Different decision-making styles, various problem solving techniques
- Different attitudes towards admission and adjustment

- Varying information on knowledge management applications and technological applications

Besides cross-cultural communications and guest service considerations, there are other aspects of hotel operations requiring specialized lodging knowledge on; accounting, financing, techniques like benchmarking, marketing, purchasing, inter-personal skills, technical competency, ethics, planning, flexible programming, quality management, security and safety management, cultural issues, green energy management, eco-lodging, e-tourism applications, adaptation and skills and legal provisions (Kay, 2000; Kotler and Armstrong, 2001; Evans, Campbell and Stonehouse, 2002; Kotler, Bowen and Makens, 2006; Yesawich, 2007; Forrester, 2008, Dixit, 2013).

Essential Competencies for an Effective and Efficient Hotel Manager

Service industries are quite vulnerable to change, unpredictable risks and uncertain environments which may be attributed to the need to react and adapt to situations like; fluctuating customer demand, crisis and conflict, unpredictable staffing requirements, weather and natural disasters, shifts in trends and such (Brownell, 2008). Therefore, as table 1 below indicates, the skill requirements of service industry staff and managers are considerably different when compared with traditional manufacturing.

Table 1- Skill requirements of service-driven organizations

Competencies	Characteristics	Competencies	Characteristics
Analytical Skills	Problem solving, economic decision & risk analysis, cost estimation, probability and statistical analysis.	Service Process Design	Performance measurement, blueprinting/flowcharting, work task breakdown, job design.
Interpersonal Skills	Professional responsibility, verbal and technical writing skills, leadership, facilitation skills, team building.	Service System Operations.	Process evaluation & improvement, service quality improvement, customer relations management, risk management.

Business Skills	Project management skills, project costing, business planning, change management.	Service System Management	Scheduling, budgeting, MIS, principles of human resource management.
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Reference: Nelsen, B. J., and Horne. J., (2010). "The New Service Science: Opportunities for Hospitality Management Education." 2010 Eurochrie Annual Conference. Amsterdam, the Netherlands. 25-28 Oct. 2010.

Due to hospitality's "unique" nature, when compared with criteria stated for managers in other fields, the criteria for hotel managers success potential are rather different. In his study, Worsfold found that hotel managers were more assertive, venture some, independent, self-assured, extrovert, determined and imaginative when compared with general management norms (1989). Thus other authors stated that managers with personality traits like (Mullins and Davies, 199; Feng and Pearson, 2006);

- being calm, realistic and stable,
- being assertive, competitive and stubborn,
- being open minded,
- having tendency to adaptation
- being active and enthusiastic,
- being outer going and spontaneous,
- being free minded, free spirited and
- being concerned with practical matters and detail are favorable traits for effective and efficient hotel managers.

Table 2 below, summarizes the probable success factors required for a hotel manager and is derived according to the secondary research outcomes that are already discussed (Gee, 1994; Hsu & Gregory, 1995; Min and Min, 1997, Akrivos, Ladkin, & Reklitis, 2007).

Table 2 - Success Characteristics of an Effective Hotel Manager

High Probability for Success	Low Probability for Success
Keeping up with e-tourism trends	Indifferent to e-tourism trends
High competency in contextual skills	Low competency in contextual skills
Strong communication / language skills	Weak communication language skills
Active personality	Passive personality
Strong desire to work in foreign environments / overseas	Unwillingness to work in foreign environments / overseas
Better comprehension of different management approaches and cultural diversity	Inefficient comprehension of different management approaches and cultural diversity
Well-adjusted family situation	Family problems
Professional managerial cognitive performance	Professional managerial cognitive performance
Outer-going character	Inner oriented character
Creative thinking	Rigid thinking
Behavioral flexibility	Behavioral rigidity
Tendency to adaptability and open-mindedness	Rejection to adaptation – closed to new ideas
Strong communication skills (verbal and non-verbal)	Weak communication skills (verbal and non-verbal)
Good stress management skills	Weak stress management skills
Through knowledge on hotel trends	Little knowledge on trends
Being sensitive to sustainability	Not caring about sustainability
Interest to innovation	Indifference to innovation
Creative thinking and decision making	Non creative thinking and decision making
Through knowledge on hospitality strategic management and tools	Weak knowledge on hospitality strategic management and tools

2. Methodology

Qualitative research method of interviewing involving semi-structured open-ended questions is preferred as a research technique due to the unique nature and need for an expert idea for the research topic (Robson, 2002; Onwuegbuzie, et.al., 2009). The population of the study consists of 20 top level hotel managers of 4 and 5 star hotels in Izmir and around like Çeşme and Foça. The participants are chosen from hotel managers who are experts on the existing situation in hospitality management. The study population is selected according to their professional knowledge on existing hotel management applications and information regarding trends and updated issues in hotel management. Though the same research study has been conducted 5 years ago with a population of 10 hotel managers of 5 star hotels in the same region (Pirnar and Genç, 2009), it is not very

meaningful to make a comparison to show the trends of change between studies (though it was the original and initial aim of this study) since it was found during the data gathering process that more than 50 % of the prior studies participants have been replaced by new names.

In this research coding according to the concepts identified through the data being analyzed method is preferred since there is no previously defined conceptual structure guiding the analysis of the data. Coding is done to the data which is gathered from each of the interviewees. The codes derived from the interviewees were defined under 3 broader topics. The broader themes that contain the codes are listed as;

- General definition of management and the role of the hotel manager in increasing occupancy rates and customer satisfaction
- Essential skills and characteristics of an effective hotel manager
- Success factors affecting hotel managers effectiveness efforts

General definition of management and the role of the hotel manager in increasing occupancy rates and customer satisfaction

Though many respondents agreed with the literature that the management function consists “getting things done through other people” only 6 of the mentioned that they are applying MBO (management by objectives) to their subordinates as “others” by “showing them the way to accomplish the things” and letting them getting done the right things. 5 of the respondents found this answer insufficient and were more content with a definition containing a “leader” term and 2 mentioned “entrepreneur” word as an add-on.

3 interviewees stated that “getting things done is insufficient without the manager’s vision, team building and consultancy ability”. Another interesting comment on the definition was “the manager should lead to synergy like adding up the missing parts of puzzle”, yet another ne was “a hospitality manager should act like a magician, bringing out the hidden treasure within his/her staff by making them more productive while getting things done.

Yet, all of the respondents stated that top managerial level’s managerial skills in hospitality do help increase the occupancy rates of the hotels and increase the satisfaction level of customers which help the hotels’ success compared to its competitors. Though it was mostly indicated that lower and middle level managers do have more impact on the occupancy rates and satisfaction levels since they are directly in contact with customers face to face. One respondent stated that “though the top managers’ impact the on occupancy rates and guest satisfaction is clear, his or her team building and motivational ability directly impact the hotels’ overall success since the whole team is what makes the business succeed or fail”.

Essential skills and characteristics of an effective hotel manager

The replies for the essential skills that a hotel manager should possess were found to be in parallel with literature and were briefly stated as; being independent, self-assured, creative, innovative, having planning skills, having communication skills, having high IQ level as well as EQ level and having conceptual skills as well as technical competency.

Also, it was mentioned that managers should be constantly updated on topics of e-tourism, knowledge management and changing trends. One interviewee mentioned that a manager without social media and e-tourism application skills, is bound to manage his/her staff insufficiently". It was stated as "having an innovational vision and strategically planning capabilities alongside with classic managerial traits is a must for success" by another respondents.

"Being punctual, having a nice personality, being flexible, having creative ideas and entrepreneurial views" were other new add-ons, along with classic "being realistic, willing to work long hours, is able to work under stress, have knowledge on the target customers and market, being open-minded, being educated professionally on tourism or BA (undergraduate level), being disciplined, being organized, being determined, having tolerance and patience, being companionate and progressive".

In addition to the stated skills and personality traits, 80% of the respondents mentioned that the hotel managers are expected to have; an understanding on cultural diversity, team building abilities, leadership traits, excessive coordination and communication (inclusive of non-verbal and social media) skills and intuition. It is commented by one responded as " being a 5 star hotel manager in a big city is a very challenging job with never ending requirements as high adjustment and adaptation skills to react changing trends and variable conditions and while accomplishing that mission dealing with many different cultures as staff or guest could sometimes be very weary and tiring".

Success factors affecting hotel manager's effectiveness efforts

The main success factors were stated as; being observant, having a flexible and easy going personality, being creative, having ability to lead the others, being calm, being to open to changes, keeping up with trends and various situations, having persuasion ability in communications, having updated marketing knowledge, emphasizing to quality and hygiene in services and having knowledge on related successful applications, being a global manager with the understanding of ethnicity ad different cultural values. One respondent stated that "giving attention to little details makes the difference as a way to success". Updated financing, costing, and marketing skills were found to be very important as one interviewee stated that "the price / value / perceived quality has never been

this important even for luxury market so a hotel manager who can maintain a reasonable ratio accordingly is bound to be successful”.

The ethical issues, moral conduct and standards and environmental sensitiveness were stated as “a must” by all the respondents. Most of the respondents indicated that the manager should have an honest personality, open character, sympathetic nature. It was also stated that success goes hand in hand with being sensitive to environmental protection issues as sustainability.

One of the respondents mentioned that “it is very hard to depend on ethical values in sales department but it is easier to comply with them at other departments”. The honest approaches to guests were found to be the most important. One mentioned that “if a guest feels deceived it is very bad for us since the negative reputation has multiplier affects and no hotel manager can tolerate this, especially at times with high competition and economic volatility like today. Therefore we try our best to be sincere, honest and open in all our relations and services with customers”.

Seven respondents mentioned that “a good hotel manager is the one who feels responsible for the society he or she works in” emphasizing the social responsibility of corporate manager.

It was also emphasized the successful hotel managers should have a strategic vision and have alternative so called B plans ready to be applied in times of crisis. As managerial technical knowledge on finance and marketing, “yield management, costing, promotion, CRM, social media, effective budgeting, trends management, trends marketing, innovative services, sustainable services, time management, crisis management and quality management” were found as the most important fields for improvement.

Conclusion and Suggestions

It is understood that managerial skills and the character of the manager itself, does have a positive or negative impact on the success of the hotel operation, staff motivation, guest satisfaction and occupancy rates. Since it is a people concentrated industry, the hotel managers were expected to have good inter-personal, social, leadership and communicational skills with calm, easy going, intuitive, tolerant, independent and flexible personalities. They should have high EQ levels along with high IQ levels, should have proper training and education and have willingness to work hard under stressful situations.

The results of the study indicates that technical knowledge on finance and marketing is a mandatory emphasizing on topics of, “yield management, costing, promotion, creativeness, CRM, social media, effective budgeting, trends management, trends marketing, innovative services, sustainable services, negotiation, time management, crisis management, quality management, social responsibility as corporate manager and ethical standards” were found as the most important fields for improvement.

The hotel managers are expected to have; an understanding on cultural diversity, team building abilities, leadership traits, excessive coordination, understanding on ethical and sustainable issues and have tremendous communication (inclusive of non-verbal and social media) skills and decision-making knowledge.

Thus taking into the results of this study, it could be recommended to hospitality schools and education programs to not only focusing on technical lectures emphasizing on classic management and marketing issues but to improve them with trendy applications. The educational institutions which want to bring out global hospitality leaders of tomorrow should also concentrate on enabling the creative, social, innovative skills and knowledge management traits of the students.

Limitations & Future Research

This study has some limitations, as many others do. First of all, time was limited for the process of data gathering which lead to a limited number of sample for the analysis, thus reaching to top level management was challenging due to their timing problems. The other limitation could be stated as the size of the population, as being 20 for the primary data gathering. This limitation was due to limited number of 4&5 star hotels operating within the Izmir region. Thus, it is recommended to apply a quantitative research with a greater sample size on the same topic and research question, which may give another angle for the research question.

Nevertheless, even though there were some limitations for this study, it has high potential value in providing a foundation for future research, since it is a very interesting topic for tourism management leading to updating educational content.

Appendix

Interview Questions

1. Is management really “getting things done through other people”? Do you agree or not? Why?
2. What is the role of top management in the success of hotel’s success and occupancy rates?
3. What are the mandatory characteristics that a successful hotel manager should have? (according to you)
4. Do you believe that hotel managers should possess extra abilities and/or skills when compared with managers working in other industries? If yes, what are they?
5. Do you agree that hotel managers should work harder when compared with managers working in other industries?

6. State the issues and updated topic impacting hotel managers' success. What are the factors that a successful hotel manager should emphasize on?
7. What ethical principles or values do you think that the hotel manager should conduct?
8. Do you agree that the management should involve strategic applications for his/her hotel's success?

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