



HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES IN HOTELS: A STUDY FROM A TOURIST STATE OF UTTARAKHAND, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Human Resource Management, an integral part of an organization, often ensures the success of the shared relationship between employees and an organization by identifying and satisfying the needs of the employees beginning with recruitment and continuing throughout their career. HR departments and components in organizations typically undertake a number of activities, including employee recruitment, training and development, performance appraisal, and rewarding. HR is also concerned with industrial relations, that is, the balancing of organizational practices with requirements arising from collective bargaining and from governmental laws. This article aims to analyse the Human Resource (HR) practices in hotels in the mountainous state of Uttarakhand, India located in the foothills of the Himalayas. This particular geographic location of India offers human resource challenges that are unique to this popular tourist destination. Results from this study show that employees are satisfied with their compensation packages but not with the working conditions, and the employee turnover rate is relatively high. Adequate training is not often provided by the hoteliers to develop employees' operational skills. Recruitment is mainly through internal referrals leading to high inbreeding and subsequent other human resource problems. There is a significant gap between what is expected from new employees and the skill levels of available talent pool.

Key words: Employee expectations, human resources, motivation, tourism, turnover

Introduction:

Hospitality is a rapidly expanding industry world-wide, and it is expected to remain a leading contributor to the global economy by generating desired foreign exchange reserves and simultaneously creating employment opportunities. Development of human resources (HR) remains the most crucial and significant factor for the success of the hospitality industry regardless of the country. Implementing HR policies that are intended to promote business is a real challenge, as employees often resist change and prefer to adhere to the traditional values and practices. It is more often true in tourism destinations located in under developed mountainous regions. Thus, there is a challenge to develop effective HR practices that can bring forth change in the mountainous tourism destinations of India. Many organizations have come forward, and are doing remarkably well in the development of human resources to meet international standards in the hospitality field. But these changes are not reaching the geographically challenged parts of the country.

Human resources in the hospitality sector require not just a human touch and “service with smile” but also yearn for individuals who are multi skilled, cross-trained, forward looking in terms of perspective and mind set and embodies strategic



creative and systematic thinking. To encourage tourists to choose a specific hotel, the hoteliers must meet or exceed the guests' expectations of service quality (*Nankervis and Deborah, 1995*). But human resource managers in the hospitality industry are experiencing rapid changes due to the inundation of information technology and ever increasing globalization (*Heung, 1993*). According to *Baum (1995)*, HR progress through education, training and development of employees at all levels is a vital component in sustaining the industry's competitiveness in the international arena. The success of tourism has given rise to the increased demand for quality professionals. The increasing demand for skilled and qualified human resources is posing a major challenge to the industry. In this fascinating industry, the effective utilization of human resources can give a hotel a competitive advantage in the market place. According to *Nankervis and Deborah (1995)*, hotels must develop human resource practices which enable them to recruit, select and retain competent employees who can contribute to the achievement of desired organizational objectives. According to *Ross (1995)*, the hospitality industry expects prospective employees to have formal educational qualifications, experience and trade skills before entering the field. Introduction of several new hospitality institutes across India has significantly improved the quality of hospitality education, and graduates are increasingly becoming better skilled and better trained to work in this glamorous and fast growing industry. Hospitality institutions must conduct training programs in order to produce trained and qualified professionals to work efficiently in the hospitality sector (*Menon, 1999; Gunn, 1998*). Educational institutions are developing model curricula to enhance the skills of the students for the hospitality industry. Some of the incorporated changes include written and oral communications; interpersonal skills and computer literacy as part of skills enhancement.

Objectives of the study:

1. To identify the expectations of the hospitality employers on various employee skills.
2. To assess the attitude of hotel employees towards the monetary benefits provided in the hospitality industry.
3. To identify the sources of dissatisfaction found among the hospitality employers.
4. To assess the level of hotel employees' intention to quit.
5. To understand employees' and managers' view on the need for training.

Review of Literature:

Human Resource Management (HRM) is becoming increasingly important to the hospitality and tourism field for several reasons including increasing demand for high quality staff, increasing consumer demand for high end services etc. The significance of undertaking this study is threefold. Firstly, although it has been acknowledged by both academic and business strategists that human resource management (HRM) plays a key role in developing and managing strategic resources and core competencies, theoretical development and empirical studies have been slow



to follow (Youndt & Snell, 2004). Barney (1991) proposes that sustainable competitive advantage is attained when the firm has a human resource pool that cannot be imitated. It is not surprising that one of the industry's biggest challenges is a continuous shortage of qualified and willing labor (Powell and Wood, 1999; Kusluvan, 2003, Kukreti, 2004). Kusluvan (2003) provided a comprehensive review on HR practices in the hospitality industry including employment instability, high levels of employee turnover, perception and/or predominance of jobs being unskilled and semiskilled, weak internal markets limiting promotion opportunities, training opportunities, pay differentials, evaluations of employee performance, and nature of jobs open to the external labor market. Mok (2002) argued that globalization of businesses has created a demand for employees who could better understand the emerging multicultural customer. Earlier Hawthorne studies have attempted to identify cause and effect relationship between physical work conditions (e.g. hours of work, rest periods, wage incentives, supervision and social factors) and employee performance. Burrell and Morgan (1979) further opine that an individual's behaviour at work is heavily determined by the situation to which one is exposed. Recent research in hospitality and tourism shows that informality and a relatively unsophisticated management style characterize the approach taken towards recruitment and training in the hospitality field (Goldsmith et al., 1997; Price, 1994; Lucas, 1995; Baum, 1995).

Jameson (1998), in his study about recruitment and training in small firms, has indicated that an informal and unsophisticated approach towards the management of human resources is the norm among small firms. Price (1994) found that there is a strong relationship between the size of an establishment and employment practices, and strong correlation between size and the extent to which establishments had introduced HR policies, procedures or other management practices. There are obvious relationships between recruitment practices and the level of training provided. Campbell and Baldwin (1993) suggested that many industrialized countries are experiencing a shortage of skilled employees and mismatches are appearing in the labor market. They also noted recruitment challenges and employee skill shortages may negatively affect the competitiveness of small as well as large firms. Bradley and Taylor (1996) suggest that there is a growing awareness that education and training systems can influence the pool of skilled pool and occupational mix of a location and eventual economic well-being of the region. Interestingly, in tourism and hospitality, with their excessive reliance on the secondary labor markets and traditional high rates of labor turnover, there is a strong tendency among the hospitality-tourism firms to have high levels of recruitment, but low levels of training. Earlier research in tourism and hospitality firms indicates that HR practices mostly include informal and unsystematic recruitment methods (Boella, 1996). Other research on recruitment in small firms has also found greater reliance on informal methods (Curran et al., 1993). Millward et al. (1992) noted that larger enterprises relied greatly on formal methods and bureaucratic procedures by specialists within human resource departments whereas small business owners/ managers are more likely to manage recruiting and personnel matters without delegating to others, and often they possess very limited recruitment skills or strategies.



Research Methodology:

The present study includes primary data collection using a structured questionnaire from hotel employees and hotel managers from a predominantly mountainous tourism area of India, the State of Uttarakhand. This state borders with China and Nepal and attracts international tourists from the west as well as east. This state is nestled in the beautiful foot hills of the Himalayas in the northern most part of India containing the basins of the great rivers (Ganga and Yamuna and others). This state is also the home of many popular tourist attractions including famous temples such as Kedarnath and Badrinath and outdoor activities often sought by tourists such as camping, trekking hiking, kayaking, wild life parks, white water rafting and mountaineering (for more details visit <http://www.uttaranchaltourism.in/index.html>). Since this state is predominantly mountainous there are numerous infrastructure challenges faced by the hospitality industry. For this study, data was collected from the following cities Almora, Kesardevi, Binsar and Ranikhet of the Uttarakhand state. According to the state government tourism reports, these cities are typically considered as the primary places where tourists stay before dispersing into various outdoor activities into the mountains or the forests. Collectively these four cities form the unofficial gateway to the popular tourist attractions of the state; thus they were selected for this study. A set of pre-tested structured questionnaires containing mostly close-ended and one open-ended question were given to hotel employees (lower level) from these four cities. Participation in this study is voluntary and resources were not available for any incentives. Prior permission was sought from the hotel managers to contact the hotel employees. Data was analysed and presented in tables 1-8.

General Managers /Acting General Managers of the major hotels where tourists are most likely to stay were invited to participate in the study. Several personal interviews were conducted with the participating general managers by trained interviewers as the first step to identify the issues relevant to the industry and the HR practices. Based on the information collected from the face to face interviews, a questionnaire was developed. This developed questionnaire was pretested for reliability and validity and mailed to the participating general managers.

This questionnaire included 14 skill dimensions. Fifty General Managers that were willing to participate in this study were asked to rate the importance of these dimension on a scale of 1 -5. Data collected from these fifty general managers (read as hotel managers) were presented in Table 9. The questions were anchored by a five point Likert-type scale where 1 = Not Important, 2 = Less Important, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Important 5 = Very Important. The topics covered in the research questionnaire included job knowledge, communication skills, problem solving skills, attitude, work ethic, marketing skills, educational qualifications, loyalty, decision making, empathy, leadership skills, intention to quit, satisfaction with the job, motivation and computer skills to study their expectations from the participant. It is a convenient sample as many hotel managers in this part of India are often less willing to participate in surveys for the fear of confidentiality. In cases where hotel properties did not have a



permanent general managers the manager in-charge of the property was asked to participate in the study.

Data Analysis and Discussion:

Educational Qualification of Employees

Education has become an important factor for getting jobs in increasingly competitive job markets. Hotels often look for qualified employees with good education and job related skills. Thus, data were collected to assess the educational qualifications of employees working in hotels in this area. From the obtained data, it is very clear that majority of employees (50%) working in hotels have just completed high school, followed by intermediate coursework 30% (2 years of schooling after high school before joining college level education) and only 20% have earned a college degree.

Income Levels of Employees

As in most service industries, a steady and sustainable income is generally expected from hotel jobs also. With tourism being the primary source of economic activity in the study area, hotel employees are expected to earn reasonable and respectable income to support their families. Since hotel employees are expected to receive compensation according to skills and educational qualifications, data were collected on the monthly incomes of the employees working in hotels. In India, typically, all hotel employees, including low level employees, are paid wages as monthly salaries in contrast to the hourly wages of the western countries. Interestingly, most hotel employees refuse to accept hourly wages preferring the predictability of the monthly salaries over hourly wages. Thus, data were collected on monthly salaries. This data reflects only the salaries of the employees not the management. From the collected data it is clear that 35 out of 50 respondents (about 70%) earn less than US\$100 per month as salary and 20% of respondents receive salary varying from US\$100-140 and only 10% of respondents receive more than US\$ 140 and above as salary every month. At the time of data collection, the US dollar was equivalent to 42 Rupees (Indian currency). These wages are comparable to any unskilled labor in this part of the country. In fact, hotel jobs are considered desirable for the predictability of the business compared to the most other service industries in this region.

Employee Satisfaction with Monthly Wages:

Employee satisfaction is an important attribute in all human resource practices. Satisfying the monetary needs of the employees becomes a major challenge for HR managers. At the same time hotel entrepreneurs must ensure that the profitability of a hotel is sustained. A satisfied employee is expected to render better service thus effectively generating higher revenues and building the reputation to the organization. Many hotels, domestic and multinational, are striving to satisfy their working force needs to assist them in delivering services efficiently. Often hotels offer incentives and frequent motivational gifts to keep employees happier. Thus, in the current study data were collected to assess employee satisfaction with their salaries.

**Table 1: Satisfaction of Employees with the Salaries**

S.No	Satisfaction With Salaries	Frequency	Percentage
1	Extremely Satisfied	10	20%
2	Satisfied	30	60%
3	Dissatisfied	10	20%
	Total	50	100%

Table 1: Clearly shows that a majority of the hotel employees are satisfied with the wages they are receiving. It is a significant positive note for the hotel industry. A majority of the employees (80%) are either extremely satisfied or satisfied with the compensation they are receiving.

Challenges Encountered by Employers:

Work place challenges are the major concern for the hotel managers to solve. Employee related challenges are abundant in the hotel industry similar to most service industries. Hotels must address work related problems promptly and failing to do so may make simple problems into major unsolvable issues. Thus, data were collected on the major challenges faced by the hotel managers. The collected data reveals that employee turnover (30%) seems to be the major concern for hotel managers (Table 2). Since employees are satisfied with the wages, one may presume that employee turnover must be caused by extrinsic factors. Interestingly, the collected anecdotal data revealed that working conditions are the major cause of employee turnover in the hotel industry. Another surprising finding is the hotel employees' lack of interest in advancing careers. But careful exploration reveals that career advancement in the hotel industry requires college education beyond a high school diploma. Obtaining a college education while working full time would be a major financial and logistical challenge for most low level employees in this part of country. Thus, a majority of them may not be capable of pursuing higher education and advanced careers in hotel business.

Table 2: Exploration of Problem Encountered by Employer on Employees

S.No	Type of Problem	Frequency	Percentage
1	High Employee Turnover	15	30%
2	High Expectation	13	26%
3	Not Interested in career advancement	10	20%
4	No Responsibility	7	14%
5	Communication Problem	5	10%
	Total	50	100%

Employees' Views on Training

Training is an integral part of human resource development in any industry and more so in service industries. Most organizations are spending increasingly more



resources in providing training to their employees irrespective of employees' tenure with the employer. But most of the hotel employees often attend training programs without any serious commitment, and only little care is taken to learn and to improve their skills. Hotels often send employees to different training programs to develop their skills so that they may offer better service upon completion of the training. Thus, an attempt has been made to identify the employees' attitude towards training and its role in their overall development. The Table 3 clearly shows that a majority of employees are interested and prefer to receive more training in their current jobs. Interestingly 36% of employees do not see any need for further training which explains the lack of desire to advance in career noted by the managers.

Table 3: Employees' View on Training

S.No	Viewon Training	Frequency	Percentage
1	Need Training	32	64%
2	No Need Training	18	36%
	Total	50	100%

Hotel Manager Opinion about Providing Training

Providing training is considered as the basic duty of all organizations, and many hotel organizations spend significant resources in providing training to its employees. But certain organizations may or may not be offering any on-going training to its employees. Unlike other industries, on-going training is vital for hotels to ensure quality service. Unfortunately, some of the hotels may not be concerned about this factor. Thus, data were collected to assess employers' perspective on the need for providing on-going training to its staff. From the Table 4, it is very clear that a significant percentage (70%) of manages do not believe that there is a need for on-going training for their staff. It is a surprising finding. It can be explained by the fact that most low level employees are not interested in participating in on-going training programs. Only 30% of the managers believe in providing some form of on-going training to their staff.

Table 4: Hotel Managers' Opinion on Providing Training.

S.No	Training Offered by Hotel	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	15	30%
2	No	35	70%
	Total	50	100%

Employees' Intentions to Leave

Quitting a job is the end result of an employees' dissatisfaction with the current job. But hotel employees tend to quit hotel jobs to express their dissatisfaction with the working conditions without giving hotels a chance to rectify the situation. Typically, in the hotel industry here, low end employees tend to quit jobs for social and personal reasons but may or may not do so for monetary reasons. Sometimes hotel employees leave a property en mass and join another hotel without considering needs of the current employer who trained them and the responsibilities they hold



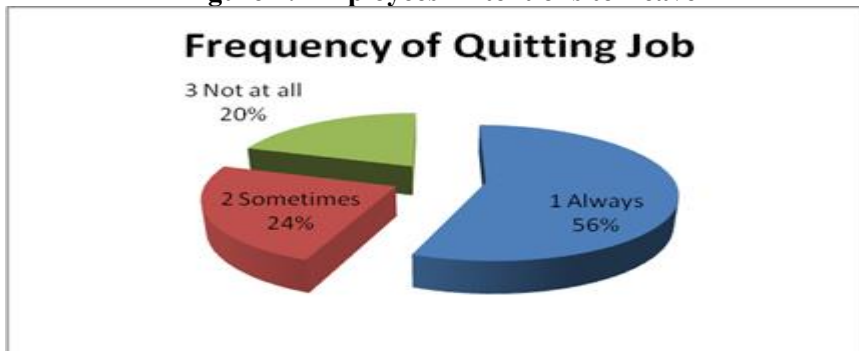
currently. The unexpected mass exodus typically happens when a new hotel opens in the vicinity. Thus, data were collected to measure employees' intentions to leave their current positions.

From the Table 5 and Figure 1, it is evident 56% of employees are always seeking other opportunities compared to the current jobs in the hotel industry. It is a very disturbing and an alarming finding. Such high percentage of employee intentions to quit reflects the poor physical working conditions at the participating hotels. Some of the hotels in this area are notorious for long hours and extremely poor working conditions.

Table 5: Employees' Intentions to Leave

S.No	Frequency of Quitting Job	Frequency	Percentage
1	Always	28	56%
2	Sometimes	12	24%
3	Not at all	10	20%
	Total	50	100%

Figure 1: Employees' Intentions to Leave



Employer Expectations of various Employee Skills

Employer expectations are considered as the bench marking points to achieve or to deliver to satisfy the end user. Hotel employers are increasingly demanding better quality employees to meet the needs of increasingly demanding customers. Such expectations steadily increasing in the hotel industry since employees have to interact with the guests that are willing to pay higher price to receive a better quality of service. Some hoteliers are expecting higher levels of skills as a prerequisite to employment with their organizations. The following are some of the important expectations as described by the general managers of various hotels in this region. The qualities with their relevant importance are included in the Table 6. In total, 14 major expectations were identified by the general managers in the first phase of the research, qualitative investigation using face to face interviews. It was followed by a survey where general managers were asked to rank the importance of these identified 14 employer expectations.



The above mentioned 14 variables were evaluated by the general manager. For each skill, the respondent used a 5 point Likert-type scale to rate the importance of skill where, 1=not important, 2=less important, 3=average, 4=important and 5=most important. The level of the importance is found highest for job knowledge (x =4.42) and lowest for computer skills(x =3.36). The Table 9 also depicts that 7 skills have the value above 4, which are job knowledge (4.42), communication (4.38), problem solving skills (4.36), hard work (4.12), educational qualifications (4.08) and marketing skills (4.08) respectively. And the other 7 skills have values below 4, which could be considered as less important comparatively. They are loyalty (3.84), quick decision making (3.8), empathy (3.74), personality (3.72), leadership quality (3.72), motivational skills (3.44) and computer skills (3.36).

Table 6: Employer Expectations of various Employee Skills

S. No	Skills	Not Important (1)	Less Important (2)	Average (3)	Important (4)	Very important (5)	Mean (6)
1	Job Knowledge			7	15	28	4.42
2	Effective Communication Skills			5	21	24	4.38
3	Problem Solving Skills			10	12	28	4.36
4	Attitude Toward Work			10	17	23	4.26
5	Hard Work			14	16	20	4.12
6	Marketing Skills		5	7	17	21	4.08
7	Educational Qualification		5	8	15	22	4.08
8	Loyalty		8	10	14	18	3.84
9	Quick Decision Making Skills		8	11	14	17	3.80
10	Empathy	2	7	12	10	19	3.74
11	Leadership quality	3	7	9	13	18	3.72
12	Personality	3	9	9	12	17	3.72
13	Motivational Skills	4	10	11	10	15	3.44
14	Computer Skills	5	9	10	15	11	3.36

Industry Implications:

Most hotels in this area are often described locally as “Black Hole Organizations”. This expression “Black Hole Organizations” is commonly used locally to describe those organizations that use temporary employees with low pay and do not provide job security; however they still expect their employees to work long hours at those low wages taking advantage of local high unemployment.

Usually these organizations tend to hire migrant workers and unskilled employees putting some downward wage pressure on local labor market. This expression (Black Hole Organizations) may or may not be universally known but it is commonly used locally in this part of the country.



The primary focus of these organizations is to maximize their revenues on tourist arrivals but not on developing their manpower in their hospitality units. No developmental programs such as employee training programs were offered by them nor did they invite responsible agencies to train their workforce. The absence of sufficient hospitality training institutes in the study area confines the availability of quality employees to the hospitality industry.

Developmental programs such as career advancement training programs, capacity building programs and training in specialized areas as social responsibility measures are practically non-existing. Due to the absence of these employee development activities which are often available at hotel properties in the neighbouring regions, the employee turnover at the hotels of the study area is increasing steadily compared to the other regions. Unlike this region, hospitality organizations in other tourism-rich states of India such as Rajasthan, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh are focusing on manpower planning, developing employee skills and creating a favourable environment to achieve their collective and individual goals. Kumaon region of Uttarakhand is considered to be relatively developed in terms of infrastructure and leisure tourist arrivals compared to the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand. In spite of its developed infra-structure this region is still experiencing high employee turnover similar to the other regions.

Thus, this indicates that employee turnover is mostly a factor of internal organizational climate and employee development practices of the hotel industry such as comparative work program, comparative compensation, work life balance, corporate social responsibilities, quality circles, standard operating procedures (SOP) etc.

Conclusions:

In the present paper an attempt has been made to understand the HR practices in the hotel industry of a mountainous region of India where tourism is the prime industry. It is inferred from the analysis that employers' expectations were very high and the present employees were not meeting the expectations at various levels. Part of the responsibility falls on the employers as they are not investing adequately in employee training. It is obvious that hotel companies should do a better job recruiting high quality employees and train them better for careers to lower their employee turnover rates. It is clear that hotels in this region often hire employees with only high school education who have no interest in learning new things, taking part in employee training, advancing their careers or pursuing higher education. In addition, hotels in this region are not recruiting high quality employees with better education so that they could be trained for better positions. Excessive leaning on low skilled high school students is believed to be detrimental to the hotel industry in the long run.

Most employees are satisfied with their current salaries but while these wages may be adequate to support a single person, they may not be sufficient to support a family. That means, most high school graduates who are usually single may be using hotel jobs as transitional jobs to gain some experience and move on to better jobs or



better education elsewhere which explains the high incidence of employee turnover in the hotel industry. So, hotels should offer better wages to attract high quality employees and to minimize employees' mind set from quitting the job as this is a major problem faced by the hotels.

Most hotels in this region do not have a dedicated HR department to develop human resources to meet the needs of the hospitality industry. Independent HR departments may help in solving employee's problems and also motivate staff to participate in training programs for up skilling.

Above all the poor interest shown by the local government in motivating the service providers and developing the infrastructure is a major setback for the development of the area. The lack of interest shown by the local and state government to procure land from the private sector to develop the resorts and other accommodation projects is also a major problem obstructing the development of hospitality industry. As this state is mostly mountainous and covered with natural forests, state government could develop exclusive jungle resorts and tree top houses as a diversifying product in the accommodation industry. The state government may take initiatives to develop high quality hotel management programs to help the hospitality industry in this part of the country.

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