

FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND CULTURAL AWARENESS

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STUDENT: RADU GRECU, 1815350

LECTURER: Dr. OLU ADEGBITE

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INTRODUCTION:

Hospitality organizations which are increasingly operating internationally create real challenges for their employees and managers to interact and effectively work with people from different cultural environments. Many problems may relate to intercultural communication between managers and employees as well as between employees and hotel guests from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the issue of intercultural communication has recently had an increasing reach in the hospitality industry. Cultural awareness, sensitivity and understanding of cultural differences should be perceived as a critical issue for business success. Therefore, the following questions still need answers from both academics and the business: What kind of challenges does the hospitality industry face in view of the multicultural diversity of its markets? What kind of managers' skills and abilities, particularly in the case of entry-level managers, are strongly needed today to manage effectively multicultural hospitality workforce? And how may educational programs influence intercultural competence development of tourism and hospitality students to interact effectively in a multicultural environment. The aim of the study is to show that cultural diversity of hotel employees and guests may create unique challenges of cross-cultural service encounters, which may provide an opportunity for service differentiation. The research problem is to find answers to the questions: how may the challenges that emerge from cross-cultural interactions become a source of hotel competitiveness and how may the educational process contribute to the intercultural competence development, to recruit employees who will be able to operate successfully in a multicultural hospitality environment.

ANALISYS:

The term "culture" may have a variety of meanings used in different contexts [Nicholls 2011, p. 211]. Generally, beliefs, a way of life, customs which are shared and accepted by people in a given society is what the culture reflects. Culture provides an individual with an awareness of his/her identity, roots, historical background, giving also a sense that one belongs to a certain community [Luka et al. 2013, p. 3]. It regulates and controls an individual's attitudes and behaviours [Choi and Kim 2013, p. 22]. Culture is shaped by many forces, among which religion, political power distribution, strong and charismatic leaders,

historians and story tellers are indicated [Poprawski 2009, pp. 31–32]. However, problems may occur when people from different cultural backgrounds misunderstand each other, which results not only from language barriers but is also due to cultural differences. Thus it is important not only to speak the foreign language but also be aware of cultural differences which exist in different countries [Luka 2013, p. 2]. Numerous service firms strongly rely on their employees to satisfy customers [Lee-Ross 2003, p. 263]. It is said that thanks to their special talents and abilities to provide high service quality, employees play a key role in gaining competitive advantage [Baron and Armstrong 2008, p. 39]. This is strongly observed in the hospitality industry which is called “people industry” [Kim et al. 2007, p. 421], where hotel services are delivered to people through people [Piasta 2007, p. 326] and the way in which guests are treated directly informs them how important they are for the organization [Martin 2006, p. 63].

The importance of effective communication is well recognized today and its role cannot be overemphasized especially in the hospitality setting, where improved communication has been identified as the key to quality, productivity and competitiveness [Wolvin 1994, p. 195]. “Dealing with people is one of the biggest challenges a manager has to face” and communication is often one of the most difficult areas [Kavanagh 2002, p. 22]. Miscommunication may strongly influence business effectiveness, including the loss of prestige, credibility, ultimately leading to financial and other business problems [Łasiński 2000, pp. 19–20]. Literature indicates that 80% of a hospitality manager’s time is spent on communicating activities to hotel guests, peers, superiors and, the most frequently, to subordinates [Lolli 2013a, p. 295; Lolli 2013b, p. 356]. Many argue that interpersonal communication is a pivotal skill for leaders to be successful [Lolli 2013a, p. 297]. Effective communication is a key to successful management of human resources and communication practices are among the most powerful tools for improving organizational effectiveness [Brownell 2003, p. 46].

Given the international nature of the hospitality industry, organizations that will be unable to successfully accommodate to cultural diversity of both their markets and workforce will be left behind. Hospitality companies need to understand the uniqueness of their global workforce and recognize cultural differences as a source of their business success. Thus, employees should be primarily viewed as the asset that constitutes value to service firms [Casado 2001, p. 28]; they should be treated as humans with their own feelings, aspirations, personal goals, and priorities in life, etc. [Gursoy et al. 2008, p. 449]. As literature stresses, major hospitality companies understand that human resources are significantly different than other company resources [Gursoy et al. 2008, p. 449]. Many of them seem to be strongly aware of cultural diversity of their workforce, which they value and promote. For example: – The IHG states that: “IHG is filled with great people. People from different countries and cultures, speaking different languages, driving our company forward around the globe. They make us who we are, so we give them every opportunity we can” [http://careers.ihg.com/about-ihg].

– The Ritz-Carlton underlines: “The Ritz-Carlton fosters a work environment where diversity is valued, quality of life is enhanced, individual aspirations are fulfilled (...)” [http://www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Corporate/GoldStandards/ Default.htm]

. – The Marriott International declares that: “Marriott promotes the recruitment, retention, and advancement of diverse employees (...)” [http://www.marriott.com/diversity/diversity-and-inclusion.mi]. Intercultural Challenges Facing the Hospitality Industry. Implications...

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– The Hilton Worldwide points out: “Our priority is to understand and embrace unique global cultures to ensure that our Team Members are seen, heard, valued and respected (...)” [http://jobs.hiltonworldwide.com/en/]

As any hotel operator knows, you are only as good as your guests think you are. Guest satisfaction should be a top priority at any hotel property, whether you are managing a large chain of corporate hotels or you operate an intimate property in a quiet location. You need to provide the guest experience that you promised, and in many cases, you will have to go above and beyond to impress your guests. If you are looking to improve hotel guest service, you will want to consider some new and innovative ways of boosting your guest satisfaction ratings.

Here are a few reasons why you should make your guest satisfaction ratings a top priority:

-Your guests can be your most powerful marketing tool, or your biggest detractors. If your guests have a good experience, they are going to share that on social media, as well as recommend your property to their friends and family members. If they have a negative experience, they are going to express their views through online reviews and go the extra mile to make sure people know about what happened.

-Guest satisfaction is a clear indication of your hotel staff's ability to provide the experience that is expected when they book a stay at your hotel. If your guest satisfaction ratings continue to decline, it's important to figure out what is causing the problem and how you can address it.

-A positive guest experience is one of the best ways to continue to build your brand. Your brand depends on consumer loyalty, which cannot be achieved without high guest satisfaction ratings.

-Recognising the importance of guest satisfaction, it's important that you actively work to improve the guest experience at your property.

These tips will help you provide every single guest who stays at your hotel with an amazing and memorable experience:

The guest experience begins long before they arrive

Know that the guest experience begins long before they arrive at your front desk to check in for their stay. You should create a mobile-friendly website that offers visual appeal and social proof of the experience that they will enjoy at your hotel. Aim for fast site speeds and incorporate valuable content into every page of the site, while also adding "Book Now" buttons whenever possible. When a traveller connects with your brand online, they will immediately develop an opinion of your brand that will impact the ultimate experience that they have at your hotel.

Respond to guest feedback

Actively solicit and respond to guest feedback. When you accept and promote your online reviews, you are showing other travellers that you value the opinion of your guests and that you are willing to go the extra mile to deliver superior customer service. When you send out automated emails with guest satisfaction surveys, you are proving to your guests that you want more information about their stay and that you strive to exceed expectations at every turn.

Connect with your guests on a personal level

Connect with your guests on a personal level. This also begins before your guests arrive at the front desk. You can use social media to reach out to your guests prior to their stay,

and learn a little bit more about them. Customised booking forms also help you gain insight about the people who will be staying at your hotel. While your guests are staying with you, be sure to add small touches and details that personalise the experience. Guests will remember those experiences for years to come, and they will significantly improve their overall opinion of your property.

Use guest feedback to make future decisions

Use guest feedback and relevant data to guide future decisions at your property. When you monitor your guest feedback and respond to it accordingly, it's important that you take note of what improvements you could make in the future based on those responses. You also can use booking data and marketing data to finalise decisions for upgrading amenities, creating events, designing promotions and more. Not only will this help you make the best decisions and use your resources wisely, but it will show your past, present and future guests that you genuinely value their input.

Naturally, a large portion of your guest satisfaction ratings have to do with the staff that you employ at your hotel. Every single person who works at your hotel — whether they manage the front desk or cook in the kitchen or tend to the gardens outside — is a customer service employee.

Every staff member plays a significant role in the guest experience, and it's critical that each team member understands that.

When hiring an employee for your hotel, you need to look beyond their basic qualifications and experience and delve into their personality. There are specific things you should be looking for in your customer service employees. To begin, you need every staff member to be friendly, welcoming and approachable. Every person who stays at your hotel is going to need to feel like they are enjoying a home away from home, and that means that they should be able to ask any guest at any time for help or assistance. When interviewing people for positions at your hotel, you should pay close attention to their demeanor before, during and after the interview. It's absolutely necessary that they are friendly and that they enjoy working with people.

Your employees also need to be good communicators. They need to be able to accurately portray and express the sentiments of your brand when responding to guests enquiries, even during confrontational encounters. They need to be able to relay important information to their superiors and to help provide guests with solutions to their problems as quickly as possible. Communication skills are some of the most important skills to have when you are employed at a hotel.

It's also important for your hotel staff members to be patient. While it can be frustrating to deal with upset guests or with people who aren't willing to work well with you, it's necessary that they stay calm in the moment and work hard to address the issue at hand. At a hotel, staff members will be dealing with people from all walks of life and from all corners of the world. Patience is more than a virtue when you are a hotel employee — it's a necessity. When you take the necessary steps to hire people who are going to be good customer service employees, it will be easy to please the guests who stay with you. Everyone who works at the hotel should recognise that they are part of a team, and that together, they must provide an exceptional experience for each individual hotel guest.

How technology can help improve hotel guest experience

Some elements of guest satisfaction are timeless. Travellers want to stay in a hotel with clean rooms, nice amenities and delicious food. They want to interact with employees who are friendly and helpful. They want to be located in a central part of their chosen destination so that they can experience the surrounding area.

However, these factors do not solely determine the outcome of the guest experience. In fact, technology is playing an increasingly prominent role in the experience of any guest at a hotel.

First and foremost, it's important to have booking technology available that allows your guests to book directly. You can invest in a [property management system](#) that includes a booking engine as well as a [channel manager](#), which will allow you to streamline your administrative tasks, while actively increasing your direct bookings. It's necessary to have functional and innovative technology that makes your guests' first experience with your hotel brand a positive one.

In addition, you should utilise a website creator tool that allows you to design an appealing, responsive website that focuses on the user experience but that also can easily be updated and maintained.

Your online presence is necessary to growing your brand and improving guest loyalty, so you need to use the right technology to create a space for your hotel on the web. Of course, you also should use technology throughout your hotel to enhance the experience that your guests enjoy during their stays. Wifi lounges, charging stations, smart room keys and customised mobile apps are a few types of technology that guests are growing accustomed to having when they stay at a hotel. You need to think beyond traditional amenities, and start offering amenities that effectively utilise the latest and greatest technology.

As part of doing business globally and operating across cultures, we often want to predict how others are going to behave. Our typical heuristic, understandably, is culture. We read a book, an article, or a blog post about cultural differences. We learn about how Germans or Chinese or Italians are different from us — how they think or act or even express emotions in a different way — and we feel like we've done our homework. We feel prepared.

But we're often surprised to discover that the person in question acts in a completely different way from how we anticipated. Instead of being reticent, our colleague from Asia is actually quite loud and confrontational. Instead of behaving aggressively, our Israeli supplier is mild-mannered. And as we encounter various other people who confound our expectations about cultural differences, we wonder where we went wrong.

The problem comes from the questions we ask ourselves. The obvious one is "What culture does this person come from?" This question is not irrelevant. National cultural differences do matter. The way you network in India does tend to be different from how you network in the United States; the way you motivate employees in Japan is quite different from how you do so in Canada.

But thinking that national cultural differences are *all* that matters is a mistake. Culture isn't everything. It turns out that if we ask ourselves a better, more focused set of questions, we'll be far more successful at anticipating how people will act and preparing ourselves for these differences.

SUMMARY:

This paper showed a wide range of ways in which the term of "cross-cultural" interactions can be perceived in the hospitality industry creating challenges for the business and education. Well-defined study programs should give students a real opportunity to gain knowledge of other cultures and cultural differences and to develop language and communication skills and abilities to work in a multicultural environment. Especially experience of other cultures may significantly influence intercultural competence development, which is vital for their careers [Yao-Yi 2015, p. 8]. In conclusion, appreciation

and respect for multicultural diversity and a good understanding of cultural differences is the starting point to manage effectively diverse employees and to provide (through them) diverse guests with excellent service enriching their cultural experience. However, hospitality organizations need to be aware that service encounters should be skillfully tailored to the specific needs of the guests from different cultural backgrounds. When hotel services interact with customers' culture and are provided in a culture-acceptable manner, then service experience may be strongly enriched. Such a culture-oriented approach may become a source of competitive advantage, as the Marriott group underlines, "Embracing differences is part of the way we do business around the world, and essential to our success (...)"

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