

The Importance of Staff Training in Hotels: A Case Study of Ukrainian Experience

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Abstract. Working people nowadays are required to learn lifelong to be competitive, successful and mobile in the labor market. To the great extent, it concerns hotel employees. The aim of the article is to analyze on-the-job training as a part of lifelong learning. 4 Ukrainian hotels of average and small size are under consideration. They are chosen because they are typical for the Ukrainian hotel market and hotels of such type are the most numerous. A specially designed questionnaire which contains 20 questions was given to the staff of these hotels. The received answers were analyzed in 2 groups: the background information of the respondents and the characteristics of training they receive in the job places. The survey shows that there is no system of staff training in small- and average-sized independent hotels. However, employees are sure in great use such training can bring to them, but the majority believes that it can help them only in their career growth. The importance of staff training for their personal and professional development is underestimated. The top management of the hotels should demonstrate the benefits of continuous learning to their staff and develop in them the desire to learn using adequate motivation tools.

Key words: Ukrainian hotels, lifelong learning, staff training, analysis, employees.

Introduction. Staff training is currently becoming the problem which modern pedagogy begins to pay more attention to. Undoubtedly, the reason for it is the growing interest of the world community in lifelong education and adult education, in particular. Adults working in any industry require more and more knowledge and skills nowadays. To be competitive themselves and to make the

company they work for, successful, staff need to be trained and professionally developed.

In modern hotel business, it is also all about competence in people, and especially the employees' qualities (Yang 2010, 14). There is a logical chain: the level of service quality in hotel industry fully depends on the qualities of its employees. At the same time, the latter that includes knowledge, skills, thoughts and attitudes of employees leads to a hotel survival and development. Due to this close interdependence, staff training in hotel business is essential in many ways. Some benefits are: the increase of productivity while employees are armed with professional knowledge, experienced skills and valid thoughts; motivation and inspiration of workers by providing them with all necessary information in work as well as help them to recognize how important their jobs are. Hence, if the top management wants to make its hotel successful, it includes staff training into its development strategy (Yang Xiao 2010, 14).

Big players in the world hotel market – international chains of hotels – are considered rather successful thanks to inclusion of their staff training into their strategic plans of activity and development. It has already become a stated fact that big hotel chains take expenses for their employees' training as investments rather than real expenses (McDonald R., Fyfe J. 2002).

The situation with the staff training in small- or average-sized independent hotels has not been investigated yet. Especially it is important to do nowadays in Ukraine, which is one of the European countries in location but at the same time it greatly lacks the correspondence to the European standards of hospitality. Euro 2012 which was held in Ukraine revealed this fact. That's why the study of staff training in Ukrainian hotels seems so acute and significant. It is supposed to show the objective situation with staff training in Ukrainian hotel industry, illustrating it with some figures, and to find out the importance of training in the eyes of hotel employees.

Materials and Methods. To achieve the mentioned goals, the author has conducted the survey in small and average hotels with the help of a specially designed questionnaire for the hotel employees.

The research focuses only on small and average Ukrainian hotels in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine. The staff of 4 hotels have been interviewed: Adria Hotel (64 rooms, 3*), 7 Days (38 rooms), Olenka Hotel (28 rooms), Asteri (24 rooms). Only the first mentioned hotel is rated as a 3 star one. The rest advertize their services and facilities but are not rated according to the star classification. The reason why particularly these hotels have been chosen is quite simple. They are typical and the most numerous in the Ukrainian hotel market today.

The following research methods which were used in the paper are:

- quantitative to gather the information from the employees;
- analytical to analyze the collected data and identify the degree of staff training importance from the employees' point of view.

As for the questionnaire, it contains 20 questions which are designed generalized and suitable for the employees of the hotel industry. Logically, all questions can be grouped into 2 parts. The questions of the first group are about the respondent's basic information, their gender, age, education, previous hospitality experience etc. The second part is about the training they had at the hotels, their opinion about it, what benefits they received from the training, how they realized the importance of staff training. A questionnaire has been given to 57 employees of these hotels. However, only 42 gave their answers. So, the response rate is 73,7%.

Results. With the view to the logical structure of the questionnaire, the results of analyzing the collected data are also grouped into 2 parts:

- the analysis of the background information of the respondents;
- the analysis of training.

I. Background Information. The results of the analysis of the background information will be shown in short because the article is generally

aimed at the analysis of the training processes, though the most interesting facts which characterize Ukrainian specificity will be represented.

The first question was about the gender of the respondent. Out of 42 answers, 36 were females and 6 male respondents accordingly. The ratio of male to female is approximately 1:6.

As for the age of the respondents, it can be said that the employees of industrially productive age work in these hotels. The main age group is between 36-45 years of old; the second large group, though it may seem strange, is between 46-55. The least represented group is between 18-25 years. Not a single person of above 56 is working in the mentioned hotels.

An interesting conclusion can be made from the question about the educational institutions the employees have graduated from. Most employees (24) have got university education, whereas only 7 of them have the specialization in hotel and restaurant business. 12 employees have vocational education which they received at colleges. However, only 1 person has a Diploma of Kyiv Hotel Business College. 6 employees do not have education except the secondary school. Out of 4 hotel directors, no one has specialized education, though all of them have a University Diploma.

Speaking about the length of employment, it is possible to notice and analyze the connection between it and the received training. It is supposed that the longer employees work in the hotels, the more training sessions they received. It may be of great use when choosing a mentor out of the most experienced employee. Since the hotels are operating on the market not more than 10 years, the longest time an employee can work in them would be 10 years. There are only 11 people with such a great experience. 17 employees have been working in the hotels from 6 to 10 years; 9 employees from 3 to 6 years and only 5 people have the job experience from 1 to 3 years. None of newcomers in these hotels is caused by the economic crisis in Ukraine when there are fewer tourists and the hotels have to decrease a number of staff.

II. Training. Traditionally, types of the staff training are classified into in-house training, on-the-job and off-the-job training (Dessler 2006, 157). The first one is conducted by the Human Resources Department which uses company facilities for training. On-the job training is usually done by each department and the off-the-job training is held outside the company. However, in the case of small and average hotels there are no HR departments. In fact, the investigated Ukrainian hotels have only 1 HR manager in their staff and not all of them. That's why in this paper we can speak about only 2 types of staff training: on-the-job and off-the-job. Hence, the questionnaire refers only to on-the-job training which is held in these hotels.

The questions about the introductory training and its length show that the majority of employees received it, exactly 30 people, while the rest 12 did not. The time for training ranges from 7 days to 2 months. The most frequent answer of those who had such training was from 7 to 10 days. The contents of the first training involved general hotel information, customer service, computer system use, hotel guide, job safety rules, etc. The importance of the introductory training cannot be overestimated because it helps the beginners get used to the new environment, get to know their work tasks better and avoid the possible problems. So, it seems important to us to find out the attitude of newcomers towards their first training in the company. The training was evaluated according to the 4 levels: important, necessary, routine and not important. Most of the respondents think their first training was important (20 employees), 10 beginners took it as necessary, 8 employees were sure that it was a usual routine, only 4 of the interviewees thought it was not important.

More questions about the training revealed the frequency of training, if it is mandatory or not and its location. For most of employees visiting training sessions is mandatory, they are not required to apply for the training. All trainings are held inside the hotel either on their job place or in a training room.

The question on the importance of training personally for the employees and for the company is aimed at identifying the benefits which employees and their company can get from their training. The list of 8 possible results was offered to be ranged from the most important, the second most important, the third, the fourth to the fifth – the least important. The results are represented in the table. The figures in bold show the first place in the line of possible results, i.e. the most significant thing which training can give the employees and the company.

Table 1

The Importance of Training

The results of training	Most important	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th
Motivation and help to perform better	22	12	4	3	1
Encouragement of professional development	6	6	8	9	13
Creation of positive attitude to customer service	9	21	7	5	0
Career development	12	8	15	7	0
Personal development and self-realization	4	5	7	9	17
Organizational development	3	6	7	24	2
Introduction of new technologies	14	8	12	6	2
Improvement of communication between management and employees	5	7	16	14	0
Not important	0	0	0	0	42

The most significant for the employees themselves are the motivation and help to perform better as 22 respondents rated it at the most important and

12 as the 2nd important result. Because hotels offer hospitality services to their customers, no wonder that 21 respondents choose the 2nd important result the creation of positive attitude to customer service. 15 employees are sure that training can help in their career development. But as for professional or personal development, the interviewees are not very optimistic, they do not connect the training and the possibility to develop and realize themselves. Figures in 13 employees and 17 correspondingly vividly show this. The staff in question does not consider the training to be important for the organizational development either. At the same time, 14 employees are likely to consider the reason for the training to be an introduction of new technologies. 16 respondents chose improvement of communication between management and employees as rather important. The striking result is that not a single respondent takes training as something unimportant.

Discussion. The ratio of male to female proves that jobs in Ukrainian hotels are mostly occupied by women. The analysis of the employees' age shows the typical feature of Ukrainian hotel market. People of matured age between 36 and 55 constitute the main body of employees in the investigated hotels. It can be explained in the following way. Younger people are seeking the possibilities to realize themselves, to make a good career and to have a good salary. Small hotels in Ukraine do not give them such opportunities. That's why the hotels have a big labor turnover and the youth leave them. Senior people value the stability and stay. Taking into account the age, staff training can be more effective as young employees do not like theory much but prefer more practical exercises and more interesting information. On the other hand, those in their 26-35 years old accept both (Yang Xiao 2010, 31).

The analysis of the interdependence of the received education and the occupied position shows that Ukraine has some atypical features. Traditionally, it is believed that the availability of a Higher School Diploma guarantees at least the managerial positions. The jobs of housekeepers and receptionists cannot be

considered highly qualified but it is these positions where the majority of employees with university diplomas are working in the mentioned Ukrainian hotels. Though all directors of the hotels have higher education, none has a specialization in Hotel Business. Here, it is a common feature for all hotels because the proper experience and general skills like leadership, ability to think critically, to work in team etc. are more valuable in the hotel industry than in any other (Plangpramool Samart, 2012).

It was supposed that the longer employees have worked in the hotels, the more training sessions they received. In practice, it is not so. Even employees with the longest time of employment mostly received only the introduction training. The typical training lasted from 7 to 10 days. It proves that top management still realizes the importance of the introduction training and conducts it. As for the employees, the majority of them also realize its importance. It means that the goals of the introduction training were successfully achieved. The training really helped the beginners adapt to the new work environment, get familiar with the work and their duties.

The analysis of the degree of training importance to the employees and their hotels proves that Ukrainian employees just as all other consider training an important tool to improve their performance. But at the same time, they do not connect on-the-job training with the possibility to their self-development both professional and personal, though they think that training can help in their career growth. They do not think that training can encourage the development and the competitiveness of their company as well. In their opinion, the powerful reason for training is the introduction of new technologies in the work process. Theoretically, they are all sure that training can be of great use but, in practice, they do not feel it.

Conclusion. Such contradictory results of the analysis show that Ukraine does not have a system of upgrading qualifications of its employees. Of course, big companies have their own training systems. But in general, the

former Soviet system of the on-the-job training, particularly, in hotels, was broken and a new one is being only established. A list of actions should be undertaken to improve the situation and to make small Ukrainian hotels competitive, being able to offer the high-quality service to their customers. The priority should be given to developing in employees the desire to learn continuously using adequate motivation tools.

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