

HOW DIVERSITY TRAINING ACROSS THE HOTEL INDUSTRY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM HAS THE POTENTIAL TO PROMOTE ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Eirini Daskalaki

Doctoral Candidate on Intercultural Studies
School of Education
University of Glasgow, United Kingdom

Abstract

The hotel industry is facing increased multicultural diversity in terms of ownership, work force, and tourists staying in hotel properties. This diversity will necessitate many changes in the hotel industry, including changes in the education of future managers in the industry and in training given to employees (Gamio and Sneed, 1992:13). Intercultural communication and intercultural relationships are found at the heart of the daily routine of hotel staff during customer service, simply because hotel staff interact with a great number of customers who belong to different cultural groups. At the same time, the hotel industry in the United Kingdom is highly familiar with the employment of international work force. Considering intercultural differences and similarities between hotel staff and international customers, the attention is drawn firstly, to the accommodation of different cultural needs that possibly arise on the part of international customers due to the different spoken language, religion and nonverbal communication. Secondly, the focus is on how well trained and motivated the hotel staff are in order to respond professionally and efficiently to intercultural situations which may occur during customer service, as we operate in a global and intercultural era.

Methodology

This paper derives from research that has been conducted on eight different global elite hotel brands in the United Kingdom in particular, with reference to three, four and five star categories. The study utilised semi-structured interviews with hotel management staff, non-participant observations between customers and hotel staff during check-in and checkout in the reception area and during dining at the café bar and restaurant. Discourse analysis was also applied on the web profile of each hotel and on job advertisements to enhance the findings from the interviews and the observations.

Research Objectives

The research focused on how hotels as business organizations deal with intercultural issues during customer service and how they organize their workforce in relation to the possible communication problems that might arise between hotel staff and customers through a lack of intercultural understanding. Do intercultural issues matter in the hotel working environment?

Findings

Throughout the study hotel management staff claimed that excellent customer service, ‘go the extra mile’ and always put the customers first is part of their fundamental organizational values which build their organizational philosophy around what customer service is. It was found that hotel staff were unequivocally passionate and enthusiastic about delivering superior customer service; so already this element denotes that the hotel industry in the United Kingdom has set up specific customer service values upon and after recruitment. Despite that, hotel organizations do not appear to supply their employees with those skills, behaviours and knowledge which underline intercultural awareness and understanding. Therefore, hotel staff have not developed to a large extent their intercultural skills, which seem to be necessary during an intercultural interaction at the service encounter. The dynamics of the business have made it imperative for managers to become global operators who are culturally sensitive (Feerasta, 2002).

As hotel staff admitted broadly during interviews, quite often they feel puzzled as to how to deal with and how to overcome: language and religious issues and how to interpret nonverbal behaviours; as a consequence both customers and hotel staff find themselves in a situation of discomfort.

Organizational Paradox

It is expected that hotel staff in the United Kingdom meet those high standards and attitudes which denote excellent customer service and customer care also in relation to intercultural issues. There is an organizational paradox though, concerning how hotels approach intercultural matters and cultural diversity which exist among hotel staff and international customers. It seems that hotels as organizations value highly the essence of cultural diversity as regards their workforce and they have managed to establish a diverse working environment which meets the criteria for competitiveness. Yet, the fact that hotel staff are short of intercultural skills which are essential for an effective intercultural interaction reveals that hotel organizations have not managed until now to address the secondary dimensions of diversity of their clientele base that need some consideration and accommodation. Consequently this may be achieved with the establishment of diversity training provided to hotel staff.

Recommendations

The results of the study indicate that hotel staff who are employed in a variety of departments in the hotel would embrace the introduction of diversity training in their work life for an optimum organizational performance. Diversity training would contribute positively to the confidence of hotel staff as they would feel more powerful and knowledgeable on how to deal with intercultural issues during customer service. In addition, it would be a permanent, efficient and professional solution as to how to tackle intercultural issues in the hotel working environment and ensure a positive customer service experience. This also addresses the claims of branded hotels that delivery of excellent customer service is of paramount importance. However, it has been found that intercultural issues during training are neglected, in spite of the fact that employees come across intercultural challenges i.e. language difficulties.

Keywords: diversity training, intercultural communication, customer service

References:

- Feerasta, J. (2002). Practicing multiculturalism can pride better guest service. *Hotel & Motel Management*, August, pp. 22.
- Gamio, M., & Sneed, J. (1992). Cross-cultural training practices and needs in the hotel industry. *Hospitality Research Journal*, 15(3), 13-26.

Brief biography

Eirini Daskalaki is a Doctoral Candidate on Intercultural Studies at the University of Glasgow where she belongs to the Knowledge and Transfer group, Creativity, Culture and Faith. Her thesis examines the role of intercultural communication in global elite hotel groups in the United Kingdom. Among her research interests are aestheticism and the employment of aesthetic labour force in hospitality, branding, multilingualism and further education in the spectrum of global competitiveness.