

HR MANAGER

A CATALYST OF CHANGE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HOTEL INDUSTRY IN NORTH INDIA

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O*n the basis of literature review and past studies the following hypotheses were postulated: (i) role of HR professionals in a new business paradigm is to be re-defined as the next millennium has set a very challenging task for HR managers, (ii) HR managers have to plan, envision, prioritize and set goals for themselves. Hence the objectives of the present study are: to indicate that a properly channelised education and training programme is needed for HR managers to vividly highlight the necessary set of attributes that he must possess. The study explores some areas to which the HR managers must give due weightage in order to create an appropriate work-culture and environment, which would provide the impetus for achievement. The study aims to emphasise upon the role of HR manager and his power as “human capital” in the enterprise and hence act as a catalyst of change in an organisation. Methodology: The data have been collected through extensive literature review and past studies. Various web-sites have been explored for relevant information. Research journals, magazines and other study-materials have also been consulted. Primary data have been collected through: (i) Field visits, (ii) Interviews with HR Managers in star category hotels and small scale hotel owners, (iii) Discussions, (iv) Questionnaire, (v) Observation. It was in this context that the present study of hotels (large scale and small scale) was carried out to determine the importance and role of HR Manager. The paper begins with an introduction on the importance of HR in organisational growth and development. Then the study goes on to discuss the role played by an HR manager and offers some suggestions to counter the hurdles that interrupt not only the employee development but organisational development as a whole.*

Introduction

People are the most valuable resource of an organisation. HR should therefore be no longer viewed in isolation and become a part of company's plans. Fortunately enough, HR is slowly beginning to evolve to facilitate transformation of the organisation and is now seen as a strategic resource not only in bigger organisations but in smaller ones too. The new HR manager is a change-agent, knowledge-creator and disseminator, mentor, coach, communicator and a shock-absorber.

“We have transitioned from an asset-based economy to a talent-based economy. The new definition of lay-off is untalented go, talented stay. Leaders must realise that talent is equal to brand” (Maitra, 2001).

There is a growing awareness that individual development is the key to organisational development. Research demonstrates that the greatest obstacles to progress are people's deeply held paradigms. It obstructs them from accepting new ideas. Fundamental to this are efforts to change mental models and create a positive work culture. “Human-beings are good raw-materials, they become assets when you train them to increase their knowledge and skills” (Kanter, 2001). This has been extremely well realised by owners of small hotels. They firmly believe that in service industry, the human-resource plays a pivotal role. The HR practices are undergoing a metamorphosis and companies that do not re-orient themselves to take the challenge head-on are bound to perish.

“Company performance can be defined through a simple mathematical equation: $K*S*A=P$ where a low component of any of the three parameters K (knowledge), S (skill) and A (aptitude) directly impacts the result P (performance)” (Bajaj, 2000).

The task of the manager is therefore to ensure high level performance on all the three parameters. HR needs to be recognised as a function at par with other departments like marketing and finance.

Uncertainty, global competition, thrust on quality and demand for higher productivity are some of the challenges before corporate organisations today. In order to attain and sustain the cutting-edge, organisations need to integrate their human-resources with business strategies. People perform the core functions of a corporation, as well as management initiatives that shape its operations. "All corporate strengths are dependent on people" (Dua, 1996).

Whereas organisational change is the most crucial factor for growth today, it can create a lot of insecurity and instability. An organisation therefore needs a champion and the more powerful and visible the champion is, the more likely the change will be successful. The study clearly indicates that this champion in small scale hotels or guest-houses is the owner himself who may not be even qualified but blessed with a foresight and natural understanding of business tricks that he can leave many well paid executives behind. He himself is the HR Manager because he takes special care to give a personal touch in all that he does for his guests as well as for his employees. Undoubtedly, he is a born manager but what he needs is formal education and training so as to become more market savvy and aware of the latest developments in the field. Therefore, for implementing change in an organisation, what is needed is formal education and training because the success of enterprises largely depends upon the leaders of business. They must be qualified and adequately skilled. This small group forms the base of any profession and that is why they are "professionals". Since tourism is an industry, which consists of multi-dimensional activities, it needs a particular kind of professional for a particular activity hence the range of professionals needed is considerably wide and varied for long-term sustainability and quality-production. Primarily a service industry, it is the people- guests and hosts who are in focus and whose concerns are more important for the sustained development and scientific management of the industry. Hence, training and development of employees particularly HR managers are fundamental to remaining competitive in the global arena.

Role of HR Manager

The industry seems to have wakened to the fact that if personnel are well-trained, they can be deployed and utilized effectively. It will ultimately increase the efficiency and productivity of the company. But the million-dollar question is – who will bell the cat? The answer is – HR manager. And to carry forward this task the HR manager must benchmark best practices for the organisation. He himself has to become a role-model so as to get the best out of everyone.

How Managers Can Help Maintain Work/Life Balance?

Time is just not money as a wise man once pointed out. It is everything – our key to effectiveness, relaxation, happiness and success. In today's overworked world, when even 24 hours a day becomes too short a span to fulfill life's commitments, understanding the essence of time becomes extremely important.

In keeping with the high work pressures, employees not only invest their time for the company but also take tensions back home. No one can promise that he can be a perfect employee, parent or a child while still getting 7-8 hours of uninterrupted sleep. Employees who are worried about their personal lives are not as effective on the job as those who are tension-free. Innovative programmes introduced by a creative HR manager can increase efficiency and productivity and pave the way for a strong future work-force. Such programmes can be: making the company family-friendly, eg. providing programmes for employees' children, offering flexible work-schedules etc. A small hotelier has his own ways and means to brighten up the faces of his employees. He may willingly pay for his employee's mother's operation, presenting a substantial gift on his sister's wedding or take the entire family of employees out to the local exhibition and allowing them to shop and eat according to their choices, which will ultimately aim at improving QWL (quality of work life). Treating the employees as human-beings works wonders for the organisation and generates loyalty, which has become a rarity today.

Employers constantly need to work towards good reputation in order to be model employers. In future, people will be more determined to balance work and life. They will also be looking to increase their skills and develop their careers. *People are the most valuable resource in an organisation and it is a great challenge to keep them contented.*

Pitfalls of a Contradictory Environment

An employee cannot use his knowledge, skill or aptitude, if the work environment is contradictory. Negative effects due to disincentives, unclear expectations, lack of interpersonal support and poor supervision can greatly diminish the working capacity of the employees. The major hindrance in the way of the HR Manager is the non-availability of finances. And this mostly happens with big names in the market. Whereas in a small enterprise HR Manager, being the owner himself may not face any such problem. The finances are for him to utilise as per his wish.

The managers having reflective skills, such as self-awareness and the ability to assess situations and resolve conflict between colleagues, capability and experience of using information to make judgments are on the path of success. He must be able to deal with trouble before it comes into the open. HR chiefs need to initiate comprehensive managerial process for developing an office environment that works for all employees. The goal of the manager is to enable each employee to realise his/her fullest potential. *The key to managing people is remembering that each person is an individual and not a number or an HR headcount.*

Concentrate on the Power of “e”

The power of “e” (efficiency and effectiveness) can be achieved only when the work-force is productive. There is a correlation between employee satisfaction, productivity and profit. There is a clear link between happiness and business success. Companies are keen to build a reputation for being good employers. As part of the war for talent, more companies are now ready to spend substantial amounts on making themselves more attractive to staff and becoming employers of choice. This includes taking staff seriously, creating well-defined career paths and exposing them to new skills and training.

It takes more than perks to make the staff contented. It needs the right attitude and that is why attracting good staff is the no. 1 issue. For example, a not so big hotelier is particular to thank his cook if he prepares something really delicious which boosts the morale of that employee and he may even determine in his heart to keep receiving such acknowledgments from his boss. In the end, all business operations can be reduced to three words: people, products, profits. *People come first.* Unless there is a good team of workers, the other two cannot be of much use. Therefore HR strategies need to be more focussed. HR managers have the noble responsibility of providing organisations with capable, committed people who are not only knowledgeable but also have the right attitude and values which match the company’s objectives and postulates.

HR Manager and the Law

Human resource professionals are also dealing with today’s litigious environment where businesses are more likely to face than ever before costly and time-consuming lawsuits from customers, employers and ex-employees. Over the last several years, laws pertaining to employer and employee have become more and more complex as government enacts legislations broadening the scope of protection offered to employees. These changes put responsibility on the manager to be aware of the company’s legal rights and obligations to their employees. Whether hiring or firing staff, or dealing with complaints of harassment and discrimination, managers’ actions can have financial implications.

Unfortunately many managers do not always know how to respond to employee’s complaints. In many cases they fail to address the matters which in time tend to intensify.

Managers should be aware of situations in which an employee may be trying to set up a case for constructive dismissal. In such cases, managers should immediately refer it to an HR professional or to a legal counsel for advice. Acting alone may lead to a lawsuit down the road.

In recent years, statutes like human rights codes have created an entirely new line of case law such as discrimination, sexual harassment and duty to accommodate. To avoid lawsuits or complaints to human rights boards, managers must be knowledgeable about the laws surrounding these issues.

Physical and mental harassment complaints are often difficult for managers to deal with because they involve the issues of credibility. A wrong judgement call can have disastrous consequences. HR professionals can

ensure that the company has an internal procedure for handling such harassment complaints and that all employees are aware of it.

Accommodating disabled employee may interfere with the rights of other employees, and this can cause some difficulties for managers. For example the company may have more senior employees on layoff, but may still have to reinstate the injured employee. While managers cannot be expected to know every clause in every law pertaining to employment, they must be aware of the basic legal principles that affect the employee/employer relationship.

But managers should not be intimidated by all this legislation. The key is to stay informed of legislation changes and to communicate effectively with employees.

Here particularly, a small-scale hotel owner is at a loss. The factor, which comes to light now, is his lack of qualification. He may be a born manager but education and training are what he requires in order to polish the edges. If such hoteliers realise the importance of education, they will definitely join the class of professionals and with this professionalism, they can take their organisation to still newer heights.

CONCLUSION

“Managing people is not only a matter of displaying management skills which just means a particular set of ideas suited to a particular place or particular time but it involves reaching out to different people in different set of circumstances so that individual attention could be paid to each of their problems. As people differ from place to place, so do their socio-economic conditions and problems. Their cultural backgrounds differ and hence managing people becomes a much complex problem which requires understanding of human behaviour and its needs” (Chaudhary, 2001).

With rapid technological advances, acquisitions and mergers taking the industry by storm, the ability to accept, absorb and implement have emerged as the highest competitive edges the functional expertise of which a manager may possess. High professionalism ushered in by the MNC's that have entered the Indian markets, have further soared the expectations of the customers. The managers of the 21st century will have to be smarter and more thorough about dealing with the real world than their 20th century counterparts.

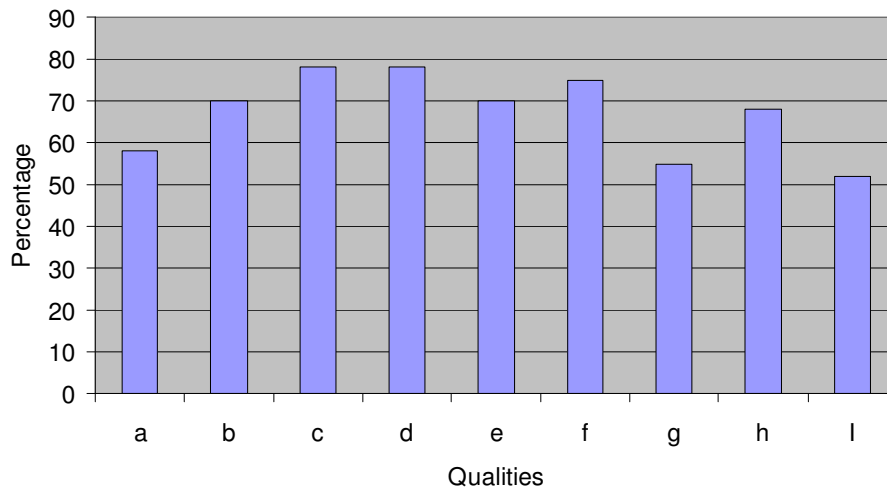
The key characteristics which when developed appropriately would help a global manager today become tomorrow's manager are:

- a. Strategic awareness
- b. Adaptability in new structures
- c. Sensitivity to different cultures
- d. Ability to work in international teams
- e. Language skills
- f. High task-orientation
- g. Human Relationship
- h. Understanding of global marketing
- i. Self-reliance

To find out what percentage of such qualities are present in the HR managers of different sizes of hotels, a study was conducted of various hotels ranging from five star to three star hotels as well as guest houses and smaller establishments.

The graphs (Table 1 and 2) indicate the percentage of above mentioned qualities found in HR managers. The graphs highlight that the qualities, a person may be born with, may be some what more in small scale hoteliers.

Table 1
Percentage of Key Characteristics found in HR Manager (Star Category Hotels) 2001 - 2002.



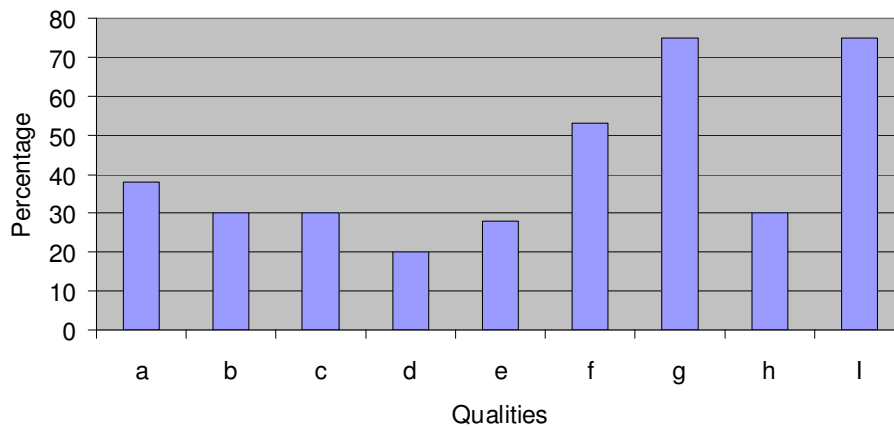
Source: On the basis of analysis to the response received to the questionnaire based on “Role of HR Manager”.

- a) *Strategic awareness*
- b) *Adaptability in new structures*
- c) *Sensitivity to different cultures*
- d) *Ability to work in international teams*
- e) *Language skills*
- f) *High task-orientation*
- g) *Human Relationship*
- h) *Understanding of global marketing*
- i) *Self-reliance*

Professionalism, education and training puts the HR manager of bigger hotels at an advantageous position. On the basis of response received to the questionnaire on the role of HR manager, around 42% of employees in various hotels strongly feel that HR manager is the most important component with regard to the sustainability of the hotel. Others opted for F and B (Food and Beverages) manager and Finance manager being more important, forgetting the fact that good services by F and B manager or better management of finances in the hotel are all due to the correct choice made by HR manager during recruitment and selection. This also points out that an in depth or 100% understanding of the concepts of HRM is still not found even in the well qualified staff of star category hotels.

Life for the global manager is not going to be the same as it moves to the 21st century. Only those managers will succeed who are “certified radical”. The HRD circuit is abuzz with change and to cope with the constant changes in today’s business scenario the HR manager will have to realise his full potential and also the importance of human factor. The importance of human factor also stems from the fact that whereas all other resources depreciate in value with the passage of time and use, the human resources appreciate in value by acquiring greater knowledge through experience and efficiency and thus reflect an inherent dynamism and development potential. HR manager being a change-agent, has fully to develop and utilise this potential within himself and within the work-force of the organisation because it is as natural for a human-being to develop and achieve his full potential as it is for an acorn to grow into a majestic oak tree.

Table 2
Percentage of Key Characteristics found in HR manager/Hotel owner (Small scale hotels) 2001 - 2002.



Source: On the basis of analysis to the response received to the questionnaire based on “Role of HR Manager”.

- j) Strategic awareness
- k) Adaptability in new structures
- l) Sensitivity to different cultures
- m) Ability to work in international teams
- n) Language skills
- o) High task-orientation
- p) Human Relationship
- q) Understanding of global marketing
- r) Self-reliance

Thus the role of HR professionals is no longer limited to mundane affairs but it has expanded to greater depths about creative and imaginative thinking that can pave way for a better organisational climate and to achieve this objective, they have to plan, envision, prioritize and set goals for themselves.

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