

Key Success Enhancing Competencies for Human Resource among Tour Operators for Incentive Travel

การเสริมสร้างสมรรถนะสำหรับทรัพยากรมนุษย์ในธุรกิจนำเที่ยวที่ให้บริการด้านการท่องเที่ยวเพื่อเป็นรางวัล

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Abstract

Despite recognizing the tour operation business for incentive travel is a fast growing and competitive market, numerous cases show many tour operators also face serious problems in furthering its success. Therefore, one of the key success factors to gain a competitive advantage is preparing the right person with the right skills and providing them the right direction to work in such as a competitive tourism business. This study explored required core competencies of staff in the tour operation business for incentive travel. A questionnaire was used to collect data on perceptions of tour operator staff concerning their required specific skills and competencies to provide services and manage a tour business. A total of 400 tour operators participated in the study. The findings showed that human resource in the tour operation business for incentive travel was crucial and a must to have tourism work related skills, tour knowledge and the right personality for providing services. These three factors were required to enhance human resource in this type of business. Therefore, possible ways to enhance these skills could be providing them the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills through trainings, seminars and providing them opportunities for reflection. This study focused on presenting gaps regarding important and necessary skills for people in the tourism business to manage a successful business.

Keywords : human resource, competencies, tour operation, incentive travel

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้อยู่บนพื้นฐานการวิจัยที่เกี่ยวกับปัญหาที่เกิดจากการเติบโตเป็นอย่างมากของธุรกิจนำเที่ยวที่ให้บริการด้านการท่องเที่ยวเพื่อเป็นรางวัลในประเทศไทยที่อยู่ภายใต้สภาวะทางการแข่งขัน ดังนั้นการที่จะให้ธุรกิจดำรงอยู่ได้จึงจำเป็นที่จะต้องทราบถึงการเสริมสร้างทรัพยากรมนุษย์ที่ถูกทิศทาง เพราะธุรกิจบริการใดมีบุคลากรที่มีความรู้ ทักษะ และคุณลักษณะที่ดี ย่อมสร้างรายได้เปรียบทางการแข่งขันและนำพาธุรกิจไปสู่ความสำเร็จได้ตามเป้าหมายที่ต้องการอย่างยั่งยืน การวิจัยจึงมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาสมรรถนะที่จำเป็นต่อมีของทรัพยากรมนุษย์ในธุรกิจนำเที่ยวที่ให้บริการด้านการท่องเที่ยวเพื่อเป็นรางวัล จากการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลกับกลุ่มตัวอย่าง จำนวน 400 คน

ผลการศึกษา พบว่า ทรัพยากรมนุษย์ในธุรกิจนำเที่ยวที่ให้บริการด้านการท่องเที่ยวเพื่อเป็นรางวัล เห็นว่าจำเป็นต่อมีสมรรถนะด้านความรู้ ด้านทักษะ และด้านคุณลักษณะเป็นอย่างมาก เนื่องจากผลโดยภาพรวมอยู่ในระดับมากถึง 3 ด้าน นำมาซึ่งการเสริมสร้างสมรรถนะสำหรับทรัพยากรมนุษย์ในธุรกิจนำเที่ยวที่ให้บริการด้านการท่องเที่ยวเพื่อเป็นรางวัล คือ การให้ทรัพยากรมนุษย์เข้าร่วมงานหรือมีส่วนเกี่ยวข้องกับด้านวิชาการ การจัดอบรม และการจัดสรรเวลาให้ทรัพยากรมนุษย์เข้ารับการฝึกฝนสมาธิ

ดังนั้น บทความนี้จึงมุ่งเสนอให้ทราบเพื่อเป็นประโยชน์แก่ธุรกิจนำเที่ยวที่ให้บริการด้านการท่องเที่ยวเพื่อเป็นรางวัลในการเป็นกุญแจไขสู่ความสำเร็จในการเสริมสร้างสมรรถนะให้เหมาะสมกับทรัพยากรมนุษย์และบริบทในองค์กรของตน ซึ่งมีส่วนอย่างมากในการเป็นฟันเฟืองหนึ่งที่สำคัญในการสร้างประโยชน์ต่ออุตสาหกรรมท่องเที่ยวให้ดียิ่งขึ้นสืบเนื่องสู่การพัฒนาและเติบโตของประเทศต่อไป

คำสำคัญ : ทรัพยากรมนุษย์ สมรรถนะ ธุรกิจนำเที่ยว การท่องเที่ยวเพื่อเป็นรางวัล

Introduction

MICE comprises meetings, incentive, convention and exhibition, which is believed to be one of the most important subsets for the tourism industry (Weber, 2001; Stolovitch, 2002). Incentive travel clearly serves an important role and directly relates to the tourism industry. The overview situation of MICE has been growing rapidly throughout the world. Many related businesses have been increasing to serve market needs. Much infrastructure and many activities and services have been developed according to the demand especially in Thailand, where the country depends on income generated from this industry (TCEB, 2017).

Incentive travel is one of the tools commonly used in many organizations; therefore, tour operation businesses are clearly needed as well as the right human resource with the right skills (SITE, 2001). In 2017, the number of incentive travel tourists increased 3.13%, reflecting the rapid growth of this business. More importantly, the incentive travel business also serves the national tourism policy that aims to generate income. Tourists in this type of business have extra pocket money to spend on their trips as they are mostly sponsored

by their companies. That said, having professional staff managing and providing flawless services for this group are necessary requirements as they would expect outstanding services worth their money.

Incentive travel is a business that requires tourists to perceive tourism and travel experiences from both tangible and intangible services and products through the performance of tour staff (Wangspaijitr, S., 2009; Chou, & Lien, 2012) clearly, to meet the particular requirements mentioned above, tour staff need to be creative in providing services in different formats and unexpected ways to create the ‘wow factor’ and provide memorable experiences (Borisut, S., Pimpoh, P., & Malumpong, J., 2005). Therefore, skills in providing services and competencies of tour staff for effective performance are necessary for the business to survive in such a competitive market at present.

Staff competency has become a vital factor for the success of any organization because competency is derived from behavior and characteristics of an individual’s knowledge and skills. The right competencies of staff often help organizations to gain a competitive advantage leading the organization to success (McClelland, 1973; Klemp, 1980; Patiwatwongse, R., 2009; Phuwittayapan, A., 2010)

Although incentive travel business in Thailand is rapidly growing and generating national income (TCEB, 2017) highly competitive businesses in a highly driven market requires constant improvement to maintain a leading position in the market and survive. Many incentive travel business companies remain aggressive to expand services and attract customers from their business competitors. This clearly constitutes a very aggressive business environment that cannot persist without highly developed professional staff and ongoing improvement in terms of their competencies. Davenport (1999) stated that human resource is the key success in running a successful business; hence, preparing staff in this incentive travel business is therefore, a must.

Due to all these mentioned reasons, this study aimed to fill in both industry and academic gaps in terms of determining key success factors to enhance competencies of staff employed in the incentive tour business.

Research Objectives

To investigate and determine important staff competencies in the incentive travel business to ensure success for the business.

Research Contributions

1. The findings of this study could be used as guidelines to recruit and select the most appropriate staff with the right competencies and skills to work effectively and ensure success for the business.

2. The findings of this study could be used as guidelines for staff training and staff competencies improvement to lead the business to remain on top of this competitive market.

Research Method

Sample and population

Altogether 400 staff employed in the incentive travel business in the southern part of Thailand, namely, Phuket, Surat Thani and Krabi Provinces comprised the target group of this study. Purposive sampling was used to determine group selection. The sample required 1) staff working in the incentive travel business, 2) age between 20 to 50 years and 3) working at the operational level having direct contact with tourists.

Research Tools

A set of 400 questionnaires was used to collect data on staff perceptions towards the expected competencies and skills in managing and providing services in the incentive tour business. The research tool was tested for content validity and reliability. The questionnaire was pilot tested using 30 subjects to analyze the measure of internal consistency and determine coefficient- , before finalizing questionnaire and distributing.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the collected data. A set of 400 questionnaires was used and administered to 400 operational staff. The descriptive statistic; means, percentage and standard deviation (SD), were used to analyze the proportion of the samples for the overview picture of the study. The inferential statistics used were t-test and One-way ANOVA which were performed to analyze and compare variables and demographic factors being studied.

Study Results

1. Demographic profiles of the target group

Sex: Of the 400 subjects, 248 were female totaling 62%.

Age: Most of the sample population was aged from 30 to 39, 51.50%, followed by from 20 to 29 32.50%, from 40 to 49, 14% and from 50 to 59 accounting for 2% of the total.

Education level: Most staff working in the incentive travel business held a bachelor's degree accounting for 79.25% of the total and 18.50% held a degree lower than bachelor's level. Only 2.25% obtained a degree higher than bachelor's.

Years of working experience: In all, 55% of staff had more than 5 working years' experience in the field, followed by 3 to 5 years', 25.75% and 13% had 1 to 3 years' working experience. Only 6.25% had less than one year's working experience.

2. Analysis of required staff competencies for the incentive travel business

The study revealed three main competencies for managing and providing services in the incentive travel business. The three required competencies are described in detail below.

Knowledge: The findings showed that competency in terms of relevant knowledge was very necessary. Relevant knowledge could be grouped as described below. The need for overall knowledge of tourism and the industry was the highest (mean = 3.85). In this particular order, the results showed that knowledge of a language as a second and third language was a must with the highest mean of 4.12, followed by knowledge of tourist behaviors and their needs with the mean of 3.95, followed by knowledge on IT with the mean of 3.88, followed by general knowledge with the mean score of 3.78 and knowledge on the job and tasks assigned with the mean score of 3.75, followed by knowledge on new patterns and new tourism formats with the mean score of 3.74.

Skills: The findings showed that overall skills of managing an incentive tour business received the highest mean score of 4.17. Therefore, when considering each factor under the perceived skills, the findings showed professional skills were the most important factors with the mean score of 4.50, followed by accuracy in providing information with the mean of 4.50 and communication skills with the mean score of 4.37, followed by adapting and being able to accept and handle differences with the mean score of 4.37. The skill of using social media received the mean score of 4.06 followed by skills in using IT with the score of 4.03 followed by creativity with the mean score of 3.87, and lastly problem solving skills with the mean score of 3.63.

Characteristics: The findings showed that one important characteristic was being service minded in providing services was the most important competency with the mean score of 4.12, followed by the mindset of being fair and not having double standards with the mean score of 4.09, followed by being punctual with the mean score of 3.84, followed by the characteristic of keen to learn and self-improvement with the score of 3.77. Exercising morale behaviors followed with the mean score of 3.77, followed by being

accurate with the mean score of 3.66, followed by having a good personality and friendly with the mean score of 3.63. Having a high level of responsibility and commitment followed with the mean score of 3.47 and taking pride in their work received the mean score of 3.27, followed by ability to control emotions and feelings with the mean score of 3.20.

3. Comparative analysis for necessary (required) human resource competencies in incentive tour operating businesses divided by personal factor: the results from t-test and ANOVA show that:

- Sex differences held different perceptions towards needed competencies in terms of characteristics at 0.05 (Sig. <0.05) yet, no significant differences were shown in terms of their perceptions towards needed competencies regarding knowledge and skills.

- Age differences held different perceptions towards needed competencies in terms of knowledge at 0.05 (Sig. <0.05) yet no significant differences were shown in terms of their perceptions towards needed competencies concerning skills and characteristics.

- Differences in educational background reflected different perceptions in terms of needed competencies on knowledge and characteristics with significant differences of 0.05 (Sig. 0.05) yet no significant differences were found in terms of their perceptions towards skills competencies.

- Differences in type of work showed that people in different areas and types of work held different perceptions towards needed competencies concerning skills and characteristics at 0.05 (Sig. <0.05) yet no significant differences were found in terms of their perceptions towards competencies on knowledge.

- Comparing staff perceptions towards needed competencies concerning running effective incentive tour businesses based on the mean scores showed that staff having different working positions and different working titles held different perceptions towards needed competencies in terms of knowledge with significant differences at 0.05 (Sig. <0.05) yet no significant differences were found in terms of their perceptions towards needed competencies concerning skills and characteristics.

Results, discussion and conclusion

From the study, it could be concluded that necessary (required) human resources competencies in incentive tour operating businesses regarding knowledge, skills and characteristics were highly needed. The results were aligned with Wacharaporn's (2013) research findings that core competencies for human resources in MICE and the incentive tourism industry are most needed in all three aspects, i.e., knowledge, skills and characteristics, characteristics had the highest average score of 4.61, followed by skill at 4.51 average score followed by knowledge at 4.37.

From the findings, incentive tour operating businesses should encourage those core competencies by managing, creating strategies, planning, or initiating policies that are consistent with those required competencies. However, these needed competencies must include academic knowledge in incentive tourism management; skill competencies regarding problem-solving skills and characteristic competencies concerning self-control, all of which still held lower average scores. Therefore, strengthening human resources competencies in incentive tour operating businesses must follow the guidelines listed below.

1) Human resources should be allowed to participate in academic-related aspects, e.g., academic meetings including having members join international and domestic tourism and services industry associations. This was aligned with the findings of Rajitdamrong (2010) and Chou, & Lien, (2012) that academic and services competencies were highly related to the readiness of human resources regarding conference centers. Managers of MICE-related entities in Bangkok and the vicinity, who are key information providers, value that personnel in MICE industries should have basic knowledge about MICE to provide correct and relevant services that match customer demands. Additionally, when those personnel have obtained a variety of knowledge and expertise in their services, they would undoubtedly create higher satisfaction levels from their customers.

2) Managers should provide training, i.e., offering basic specialized services in addition to the personnel's field of work. Topics may include airplane ticket training programs, foreign language instruction (in addition to English), as well as encouraging professional English language instruction and related information technology trainings by experts. Managers must host regular workshops that create scenarios for their personnel to learn in so that once those scenarios actually occur, the personnel would have the competencies to solve or report the problems to their supervisors as future case studies. The findings were also aligned with those of Rajitdamrong (2010) and Jeffrey, & Adomdza, (2011) that concluded that trainings were highly related to the level of readiness of the personnel to perform in conference areas. Trainings are vital steps to prepare personnel's readiness regarding MICE-related events in conference centers. Managers of MICE-related entities in Bangkok and the vicinity viewed that personnel in this field should receive regular trainings and development to increase work competency and be ready for any changes in the industry. These findings also agreed with Nadler, acclaimed Father of Human Resource Development, who stated that educational workshops are the means to encourage learning and future growth for personnel (Nadler, L., & Nadler, Z., 1987)

3) Time should be allocated for meditation; for participating in mind, behavioral and consciousness encouragement activities; as well as encouraging personal routines to successfully apply and control their mind and emotions which is supported by the work of Jeffrey, & Adomdza, (2011). Emotional control is crucial for service provider personnel who need to offer assistance to a variety of clients. This was also aligned with Sachukorn (2011) who explained that drastic emotional expression would destroy a good personality. Thus, being able to control emotions requires studying Dhamma to control emotions, and encourage a calm consciousness. Each personnel needs to explore and adapt different techniques to find the right method to maintain balance in each particular situation. Ultimately, personnel must determine and practice consistently positive routines to achieve the best outcome in controlling their emotions.

Recommendations

1. The findings should be further developed and applied to improve human resource competency development in incentive tour operating businesses in order to enhance higher quality working operations.

2. These trainings should be included in educational programs in the tourism and services field.

3. Internal and external examinations regarding human resources development must take place to determine problems and their effects upon incentive tour operating performance, as well as operating issues at the individual level. The initiative can help develop human resource competencies to prevent, correctly respond to, or solve each issue efficiently.

4. Other academic theories should also be applied to holistically examine and apply to create more beneficial outcomes.

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