

Strategic Capacity Building through Human Resources Development in the Hospitality Industry of Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria

****Ekundayo I. Mejabi, PhD**

&

***George Adah**

****&***Department of Leisure and Tourism Management,
School of Technology,
Federal Polytechnic, Idah.
Kogi State.

emajebi@yahoo.com.

****Corresponding Author**

Abstract

Service quality is an essential ingredient for the hospitality and tourism establishments to achieve optimum performance and profitability. Hence, investing in Human Resource Development (HRD) allows hospitality establishments to enhance staff knowledge and capacities to contribute to the provision of superior service quality and customers' satisfactions. Lokoja the Kogi State capital has become a haven for investors in hospitality business. However, the level at which these investors take cognisance of the imperative of HRD in their business outfits still leaves much to be desired. To this end, this study attempts to unearth the role, importance and import of HRD in building the capacity of the hotels establishments in the city of Lokoja towards sustainable development of the sector. The study adopts a qualitative approach and purposive sampling method was used to collect data through in-depth interviews from a purposive sample of 10 hotels in the city. 38 Managers and line managers were interviewed from the sample of 10 hotels. The interview transcripts were sorted, coded and data analysed by way of thematic analysis. Findings reveal that HRD improves Staff Attitude to work. However, most of the hotels in Lokoja were being managed by unqualified staff, as a result of wrong recruitment procedures by the proprietors. The study suggests a change in mind-set of hotel proprietors and investors, by allowing competence and professionalism as the hallmark in the recruitment of managers and staff in their establishments.

Key Words: Human Resource Development (HRD), Hospitality, Capacity Building, Sustainability,

DOI [URL:https://doi.org/10.36758/jirses/v1n3.2021/1](https://doi.org/10.36758/jirses/v1n3.2021/1)

Introduction

The success of any hospitality establishment operation is dependent on the quality of staff (Aksu, 2005; Hai-yan & Baum, 2006). However, service quality is paramount to the success or otherwise of any hospitality and tourism establishment, which can only be achieved through the level of quality staff available. Service quality is frequently presented as primarily a marketing-orientated concept, designed to assist hotels to win and keep customers (Baum, 2007). Suffice it to say lack of qualified staff impacts on the service delivery and experiences of guests, which ultimately affects the guest's future patronage demand. Therefore, equipping hotel employees with the necessary skills that will enhance their performance is very important. Lack of adequate training among the hotel staff are counterproductive (Koch & McGrath, 1996) because it ultimately result into lack of commitment and low productivity in the hotel business. Hotel staff should be well-trained to get skilful, which gives good services to the customers. Human resources (HR), remain an important determinant of hospitality and tourism production and affects destination competitiveness (Murphy & Price, 2005). Human resources are the first point of contact between

a hospitality outfit and its customers. Therefore, investing in Human Resource Development (HRD) allows hospitality establishments to enhance staff knowledge and capabilities (Leopold & Harris, 2009); thereby contributing to the provision of superior service quality and customer satisfaction (Aksu, 2005). This in effect would enhance the capacity of the organisation to achieve its set objectives. Swanson (1996) defines HRD as “a process of developing and unleashing human expertise through organization development, personal training and development for the purpose of improving performance”. The general consensus is that HRD encompasses three components: learning, performance and change (Tseng & McLean, 2008).

The concepts of HRD is well entrenched in the Human Resources Management (HRM) and general management literatures. However, relatively fewer studies exist on HRD in the hospitality and tourism sector, particularly as it relates to Lokoja Kogi State and Nigeria in General. The fact remained that, majority of the studies on HRM practices in the hospitality industry mainly focused on developed economies as seeing in the following researches carried out by the following scholars: Ingram & Baum, (1997) on USA; Jago & Deery (2004) on Australia; Poulston, (2008) on New Zealand; Langer (2003) on Germany and Maxwell, McDougall & Clair (2000) on United Kingdom among others. Consequent upon this, the objectives of this study therefore, is to identify the perceived role, outcomes, importance and challenges of HRD in the hospitality industry in Lokoja, Kogi State. This is a way of filling the notable gap of the dearth of literature in this aspect of the industry.

Lokoja is a city in Nigeria. It lies at the confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers and is the capital of Kogi State. Since the creation of Kogi State in 1991, Lokoja has experienced expansion in growth of its various sectors. The hospitality sector is one particular sector that this expansion is evident. Different categories of Hotels and other hospitality outfits are springing up on daily basis. Hence, this study attempts to unearth the impacts of HRD as a capacity building strategy for the continued growth and development of hospitality and tourism sector of the city of Lokoja. The paper’s contribution to the literature is three-fold. First, the study identifies to what extent HRD is prevalent in the hospitality industry of Lokoja. Second, it investigates the importance and challenges of HRD. Finally, from a methodological perspective, the study demonstrates that combining thematic with content analysis enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research.

Literature Review

Tourism and Hospitality are a sector that is widely recognised by governments for its employment creation potential. Baum (2006) affirms this view when he posited that; “Employment creation has long been recognised as a major driver in government commitment to the development of tourism and hospitality”. But the challenge in countries such as Nigeria where skills shortages are increasingly problematic alongside relatively full general employment is to ensure that jobs created in the sector have a high knowledge and skills component. Human Resource Development (HRD) is therefore a framework for helping employees within the Tourism and Hospitality sector develop their personal and organisational skills, knowledge and abilities for an effective and improved performance. HRD which encompasses regular staff training is an important factor of Human Resource Management (HRM) which has to be formally ensconced in the operational technique of an organisation (Randle, 1997) notwithstanding very few organisation pay due attention to this fact.

Generally, the hospitality industry tends to be people oriented and believe in HRD practices (Nolan, 2002), the value of HRD in the hospitality industry is closely associated with the positive outcomes it generates for the organization. Increased productivity is the most tangible positive outcome associated with HRD (Aksu, 2005). In their study of hotel establishments in Western Australia, Davies, Taylor and Savery (2001) found improvements in staff training had reciprocated effects on quality, productivity and reduced employee turnover in effect, expanding

the capacity building system of the organisations. Kilic and Okumus (2005) showed that staff training and development was one of the five most important factors influencing productivity in small hotels.

It also appears that there is a nexus between organisations developing HRD policies and increased service quality through committed and satisfied staff (Kandampully, 2006; Davidson, McPhail & Barry, 2011). This effect seems to extend beyond the context of developed countries to developing countries as well. For example, Chand and Katou (2007) showed a positive and high correlation between staff training and development (induction and needs based training) and good service quality in the Indian hotel industry. However, this link between staff training and increased productivity and service quality may not always be clear (Nolan, 2002) given that such consequences of training may only materialise over a number of years while the cost of staff training and development has to be justified on a yearly basis. In addition, the causal link between HRD investment and organisational performance is also difficult to establish, but evidence of this relationship exists in manufacturing firms (Luoma, 2000). Nevertheless, Baum (2006) asserts that “the attainment of optimal service quality should be the aim within hospitality and tourism businesses”. This is a function of effective education and training practices both within the companies themselves but also within the preparatory educational experience of those recruited.

Also, HRD increases commitment to the organisation and employees are less likely to quit if training and development activities are appropriately mapped onto career advancement opportunities (Davies, Taylor & Savery, 2001; Jago & Deery, 2004). It also bring about harmonious relationship amongst workforce. Baum (2006) puts flesh onto this statement when he postulates that “achieving harmony and effective cooperation and teamwork within a workforce in a multicultural and multilingual industry as tourism and hospitality depends on effective training of the team”.

The hospitality industry has, in recent years, shifted from fulfilling skills gap to developing competencies (Kalargyrou & Woods, 2011). Yet, this approach focuses all development activities on employee contribution to tactical as opposed to the strategic component of business strategy. The role of HRD is to support competitiveness in general (Luoma, 2000), rather than the adoption of a learning approach to strategy-proactively facilitating organisational change, nurturing learning within the workforce and facilitating line managers in the creation of a culture/climate of learning. HRD also plays an important role in improving employees’ attitude, teamwork, self-awareness, and job satisfaction (Roel & Swerdlow, 1999), resulting in improved competitiveness. However, these outcomes can be readily observed if a capability-driven HRD approach is adopted, in which human behaviour is perceived as a critical source of sustained competitive advantage (Luoma, 2000). Development initiatives are needed to build competencies using a variety of HRD activities on the job and via external interventions. Competence building is systematic: formal, informal, structured and unstructured learning are fully integrated in the wider strategic HRM policies and plans (Luoma, 2000).

Previous research mainly suggests six positive outcomes of HRD in the hospitality sector: increased productivity, improved service quality, reduced employee turnover, increased staff commitment, improved employee behaviour and job satisfaction, and improved business performance. In addition, the literature on HRD in manufacturing firms (e.g Luoma, 2000; Tseng & McLean, 2008) suggests that HRD can lead to other positive outcomes such as shaping organizational missions and goals, influence corporate culture, strategic partnerships with HRM and line managers and shape future HRD strategies, policies and plans. However, in the hospitality sector, HRD is almost exclusively related with provision of solutions for immediate work problems rather than the long-term development of people and the creation of a learning organisation (Nolan, 2002). As a result, this can explain differences in outcome associated with HRD practices in the hospitality sector and manufacturing firms. Where a more strategic approach is adopted, the significant driving force still remains staff training (Nolan, 2002). The

unique social and cultural context of developing countries and small islands, may lead to the role and outcomes of HRD in the hospitality sector being different to those previously identified in the literature.

Methodology

The study was conducted among hotel managers and other senior staff in Lokoja. 10 hotel establishments were purposively selected for the study. Namely; Nostalgia Hotel, Idriana Hotel. Diato Hotel, Rockview Hotel, Halims Hotel, Reverton Hotel, Hotel Chavid, Blossom Hotel, Santof Hotel and Skyview Hotel, all located in the city of Lokoja.

A qualitative approach in the form of semi structured interviews was adopted to understand the role, importance and challenges of HRD in the hospitality industry of Lokoja. To maximise participants' engagement, we designed three broad questions: (1) What activities do you associate with HRD in your establishment?; (2) How important is HRD to your hotel?; and (3) What improvements have you seen over the years in your Hotel due to HRD initiatives? The target population was managers of the hotels and some line managers where applicable from three selected departments; (i.e.; Food and Beverage, Customer-Relations/Front-Office and Housekeeping). Line managers encompass departmental heads and supervisors (Hales, 2005).

The study adopts a purposive sampling method and focuses on the 10 hotels. 38 Managers and line managers (see Table 1) were interviewed from the sample of 10 hotels. Respondents held Managerial (hotel manager) supervisory (housekeeping, or Front Office supervisors) and assistant managerial positions (executive chef, bar manager, housekeeping). Each interview was conducted face-to-face which lasted averagely 30 minutes in each case. It was tape-recorded and later transcribed.

The interview transcripts were sorted and coded according to thematic analysis. This thematic idea was used to identify key themes in the data. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines, we generated a 'thematic map'. The emerging themes were then supported with selection of vivid extracts from the transcripts which were synthesised in descriptive summary as the findings of the study.

Result and Discussion:

The analysis and discussion of the data gathered from the interview survey of the respondents is hereby presented.

Table 1: Profile of participants

| <i>Variables</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>percentage%</i> |
|---|------------------|--------------------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 27 | 71.1 |
| Female | 11 | 28.9 |
| Age | | |
| 26-35 years old | 11 | 28.9 |
| 36-45 years old | 20 | 52.6 |
| 46-55 years old | 7 | 18.5 |
| Education | | |
| Post Graduate Degree | 1 | 2.6 |
| BSc/HND | 17 | 44.7 |
| ND/NCE | 14 | 36.8 |
| School Certificate | 6 | 15.8 |
| Qualification in Tourism/Hospitality related Disciplines | 6 | 15.8 |
| Qualification in Non-Tourism/Hospitality Related disciplines | 32 | 84.2 |
| Job Position | | |

| | | |
|-------------------|----|------|
| Manager | 10 | 26.3 |
| Assistant Manager | 9 | 23.7 |
| Supervisor | 19 | 50 |
| Department | | |
| Food and Beverage | 8 | 21.1 |
| Front Office | 13 | 34.2 |
| House Keeping | 7 | 18.4 |

Result reveals that the smallest hotel in the sample had 19 rooms and the largest hotel had 98 rooms. From Table 1, there were more males respondents (71.1%), than female (28.9%) in the study. This reflects a significant dominance of male gender in the top echelon of most of the hotel establishments in Lokoja. Over half 52.6% of the participants were in the age group 36 to 45 years, which is an indication that most of the respondents are in the youth age bracket and still much active in their productive life. Majority of the respondents were quite educated with 84.2% of tertiary education level, and the remaining 15.8% holding school certificate qualifications. This result implies that overwhelming majority (84.2%) of the respondents were quite educated with varying degrees, diplomas and certificates. However, only a small percentage (15.8%) of the respondents have qualifications with specialisation in Tourism or Hospitality. While the vast majority (84.2%) held qualifications that are non-tourism and hospitality related. This indicates that most of the top management staff in our study are non-professionals. As regards position held by the respondents; 26.3% held managerial positions, 23.7% were Assistant Managers, while 50% of the respondents were on supervisory roles in their respective establishments.

Findings:

1. Activities Associated with HRD in hotel establishments in Lokoja:

The study reveals that Human Resources is all about attracting, selecting, orienting, training, coaching, counselling, disciplining, mentoring, developing and evaluating the performance and supporting and retaining the hotel's most important resources: the people. However, most hotels in our study either deliberately or inadvertently ignored these basic principles of HRM. Findings shows that no single hotel in our sample have an HR Department. The general views in the study is that the General Managers or Hotel Manager (as nomenclature defers from one hotel to another) handle the role of HR. As identified by Walker (2007) 'the Human Resources Department is responsible for creating and maintaining an environment in which people can flourish'; and to do this they do four main things: (1) recruit and select talented people; (2) maintain outstanding employee relations; (3) act as a standard bearer by ensuring that every employees meets or exceeds standards; and (4) ensure legal compliance, training and development. Since the role of HR is subsumed under the hotel managers who are not skilled in the act of HRM, the resultant effect shows a not too impressive HRD outcome.

Although most respondents in the study disagreed with the assertion that HRM practices in their organisations are ineffective; a cursory look at the hotels selected in the study points to that fact. Most of the hotels show signs that indicate lack of basic productivity standard, non-adherent to employment law, lopsided recruitment and selection process and ineffective training and development policies.

2. Importance of HRD to Hotel establishment in Lokoja:

In terms of the relative importance of HRD in the hospitality establishments in Lokoja, the thematic analysis of the study identifies four major themes: (1) HRD is a challenge but key to organizational success and capacity building; (2) HRD is associated with service quality improvements; (3) HRD is the sharing of knowledge and skills among employees; and (4) HRD contributes to operational efficiency.

The study reveals that there is a general agreement among the respondents that HRD improves Staff Attitude to work. Many managers in the study mentioned that improvements in general staff attitude over the years were the primary consequence of training and development. As one hotel manager said:

“The young staff who are fresh from school sometimes lack professionalism, discipline and being able to work together. Through the on-the job training we give them here, we have been able to get them to behave appropriately and be considerate to each other. Lots of team work are required in hotel operation and they should be able to integrate with the existing team”.

Another positive benefit of HRD in form of training for capacity building which the study reveals is that, it enhances better teamwork among front-line staff. Line managers have been able to cultivate a culture of positive attitude towards the workplace and fellow employees as well as team spirit among staff. Also, the reporting relationships between managers and front-line employees are perceived to have improved due to better communication and a stronger sense of belonging to the hotel. This corresponds with Baum (2006) assertion that “achieving harmony and effective cooperation and teamwork within a complex industry as hotel establishment depends on effective training of the workforce as well as their supervisors and managers”. While Tseng & McLean, (2008) also corroborated the findings that “HRD efforts cannot ignore the prevailing and desired cultures of an organization in the learning process”. Hence, developing the right workplace culture is important for hotels in Lokoja, as one of the supervisors in the study commented thus:

“Staff training has enabled us to cultivate a positive attitude, show a sense of belonging, and always be ready to help customers and other employees. These create better morale among staff; they feel more confident in their job. There is better team spirit, more professional employees, and guests are very happy.”

However, the focus on upgrading skills rather than developing staff competencies and immediate outcomes as opposed to long-term benefits have consequences for the competitiveness of hotels and the tourism industry. In comparison to other cities in Nigeria with similar economy status, most of the hotels in Lokoja have a relatively low level of investment in education and training of their staff in the long-term, this situation will have a detrimental impact on the positional advantages of the hospitality industry in the city in building its capacity towards sustainability.

3. Improvement noticed due to HRD Initiative:

In the area of noticeable improvement due to HRD initiative in the hotel industry in Lokoja; study reveals that most of the hotels in Lokoja were being managed by unqualified staff. Hotels proprietors mainly engage their relatives as managers and other top positions not minding their capacities and professional competences to manage such establishments. This lopsided recruitment and selection procedures shows little improvement noticed as aftermath of HRD policies which lead to lack of attainment of optimal service quality and low productivity in those establishments.

As reveals in table 1 above, majority (84.2%) of the staff in the selected hotels have no academic qualifications in Hospitality management and Tourism. This has drastically affected their capacities to effectively and professionally manage such establishments for enhanced capacity development. As typified by Hutchinson & Purcell, (2003) that “Managers are fulfilling greater HR responsibilities and therefore have the ability to positively influence employee behaviour and organisational performance”. If managers are professionally competent or adequately trained as ‘trainers’, they can also contribute to HRD functions such as policy formulation, training plans for enhanced capacity building. Therefore, for long-term sustainability of the hospitality sector in Lokoja, managers should be considered as key stakeholder in the HRD process.

Limitations and Future Research

To conclude, the study contributes to the lack of qualitative studies in understanding HRD as a capacity building mechanism for sustainable development of the hospitality sector in Lokoja. However, the study entails limitations, which offer avenues for future research. First, the results cannot be generalised to the entire hospitality sector in Lokoja. Future studies can extend the results by adopting a quantitative approach. Second, only the views of managers and line managers were included in this study. For a more comprehensive understanding of HRD, future studies should triangulate the views of proprietors and investors in the sector to understand their commitment to HRD and capacity building in the sector.

Recommendations and Conclusion:

In conclusion, to foster capacity building for sustainable development of the sector in Lokoja, a change in mind-set of hotel proprietors and investors is needed. Replacing the current nepotism of engaging only friends and family members to manage their hotels with a more holistic system of employing competent and qualified personnel is ideal for sustainable development of the sector in Lokoja. In addition, findings suggest that well trained managers can act as change agents, coaches, and communicators in the hospitality establishments. Hence, developing the competence of managers and their subordinates, or at best engaging the services of professionally trained staff is vital to a profitable organisations resulting to a sustainable development of the sector in Lokoja.

Also, changes in the education system and perhaps in the Lokoja metropolis as a whole is necessary. The city of Lokoja as of present has no single institution of higher learning that offers courses in Tourism and Hospitality related disciplines. As a matter of fact, The Federal Polytechnic located in Idah is the only institution in the whole of Kogi state that offers courses in the fields of Tourism and Hospitality Management. Hence, proximity has negatively impacted on this institution to fill the existing gap of the dearth of trained staff in the industry in form of short time training or part time programme. It becomes imperative therefore for the two higher institutions in the city (Kogi State Polytechnic, and Federal University Lokoja) to mount programmes in the field of Hospitality and Tourism to fill this gap. This is one of the surest ways by which human resource capacity building would be enhanced for the sustainable development of tourism and hospitality sector of Kogi State.

References

- Aksu, A.A. (2005). Defining training needs of five-star hotel personnel: an application in the Antalya region of Turkey. *Managerial Auditing Journal*, 20(9), 945-953.
- Baum T. (2006) *Human Resource Management for Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure*; London, Thomson Learning
- Baum, T. (2007) Human resources in tourism: still waiting for change. *Tourism Management*, 28, 1383-1399.
- Chand, M., & Katou, A.A. (2007) The impact of HRM practices on organizational performance in the Indian hotel industry. *Employee Relations*, 29(6), 576-594.
- Davidson, M.C.G., McPhail, R., & Barry, S. (2011). Hospitality HRM: past, present and the future. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 23(4), 498-516.
- Davies, D., Taylor, R., & Savery, L. (2001) The role of appraisal, remuneration and training in improving staff relations in the Western Australian accommodation industry: a comparative study. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 25(7), 366-373.
- Hai-yan, K., & Baum, T. (2006). Skills and work in the hospitality sector: The case of hotel front office employees in China. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 18(6), 509-518.

- Hutchinson, S., & Purcell, J. (2003) *Bringing policies to life: the vital role of front-line managers in people management*; London: CIPD
- Ingram, P., & Baum, J.A.C. (1997) Chain affiliation and the failure of Manhattan hotels, 1898-1980; *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 42, 68-102
- Jago, L.K., & Deery, M. (2004) An investigation of the impact of internal labour markets in the hotel industry *The Services Industry Journal*, 24(2), 118-129
- Kalargyrou, V., & Woods, R.H. (2011) Wanted: Training competencies for the 21st century. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 23(3), 361-376.
- Kandampully, J. (2006). *Services Management: The New Paradigm in Hospitality*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Kilic, H., & Okumus, F. (2005) Factors influencing productivity in small island hotels: evidence from Northern Cyprus *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 17(4), 315-331
- Koch, M.J. & McGrath, R.G. (1996) 'improving labour productivity: Human Resource Management Policies Do Matter'. *Strategic Management Journal* 17, 335-354
- Langer, G. (2003). A comparison of training activities in the Austrian and German accommodation trade using the Training Activity Degree *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 5, 29-44
- Leopold, J., & Harris, L. (2009), *The Strategic Managing of Human Resources*, Harlow, Essex: Prentice Hall Education Ltd.
- Luoma, M. (2000) Developing people for business success: capability driven HRD in practice. *Management Decision*, 38(3), 145-153.
- Maxwell, G., McDougall, M., & Clair, S. (2000). Managing diversity in the hotel sector: the emergence of a service quality opportunity. *Managing Service Quality*, 10(6), 367-373
- Murphy, P.E., & Price, G.G. (2005) Tourism and sustainable development, In W.F. Theobald, *Global Tourism* (3rd Edition), Burlington: Elsevier, 167-192
- Nolan, C. (2002). Human resource development in the Irish hotel industry: the case of the small firm. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 26(2/3/4), 88-99.
- Poulston, J. (2008). Hospitality workplace problems and poor training: a close relationship. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 20(1), 412-427.
- Randle, S.J. (1997) "Flexibility, Adaptiveness and Responsiveness (FAR-ness as the key success factors in market entry in the South East Asia growth wedge". PhD Thesis, Department of Management, Monash University, Victoria.
- Roehl, W.S., & Swerdlow, S. (1999). Training and its impact on organisational commitment among lodging employees, *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 23(2), 176-194
- Swanson, R.A. (1996). In praise of the dependent variable *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 7(3), 203-207.
- Tseng, C.C., & McLean, G.N. (2008). Strategic HRD practices as key factors in organizational learning. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 32(6), 418-432.
- Walker, J.R. (2007) *Introduction to Hospitality Management 2nd Ed.* New Jersey, Pearson Education Inc.