

# THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING TOWARDS BETTER SERVICE PRODUCTIVITY: A CASE OF 3-STAR HOTELS IN KUANTAN

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*Abstract:* The most critical resource in an organization is the workforce. It is the staff that directly uses the other resources to sell, to make, to process, or to provide quality of service. How well the resources of money, materials and equipment are used depends largely upon the human resources. Therefore, as claimed by De Cenzo (1994) [2], every organization needs well-trained and experienced people to perform the activities that must be completed. Thus, there is a continual need for the process of staff development and training to fulfill the organizations needs (Steward 1993) [12]. This paper seeks to find out the importance of training in developing skills of rank and file employees of 3-star hotels in Kuantan area towards a better service productivity.

## INTRODUCTION

Life would be easier if people's expectations remain, unfortunately, they do not (Randal and Senior 1996) [10]. The rising expectations of the people, which may be largely due to their sophisticated lifestyle, have made them more demanding. This has certainly constituted economic and social phenomena to our contemporary world, especially when the hospitality industry is concerned. In today's world, it has become complex, fast-growing and over-changing. Socio-economic conditions, demographic shifts, and changing habits and desire are known to have been some of the factors affecting the growth of the industry. Companies, therefore, need to work harder to keep their existing workforce and increase their productivity in order to meet the demands of customers' increasing expectations, as noted by Lewis et al (2000) [7], keeping good employees leads to keeping good customers.

The quality of services depends in large measure on the skills and attitudes of the people producing the services. Employees do not only need to understand that what they do may have a considerable impact on the customer, but broaden their scope of knowledge of more processes, technologies, and people with whom they must interact. They need to understand how everything the company does comes together for the customer as each customer expects. The demands for excellent communication skills, applicable expertise and negotiating ability, are some examples of the skills required in maintaining the employees' quality performance. These factors by themselves already point to an increasing need for training. Therefore, the purpose of having training and learning in the organization is clear (Palcicio et al 1986). The right training programmes are essential in determining the employees' services quality in the organization.

### *Training Defined*

Training and development are planned, continuous efforts by management to improve employees' competency levels and organizational performance. Although the terms may be used interchangeably, a distinction is sometimes made between the two. Training is designed to provide learner with the knowledge and skills needed for their present jobs (Mondy and Noe 1999) [8].

Training, like all other aspects of an organization, is concerned ultimately with performance, both the individual employees' job performance and the organization's performance as a whole. The particular focus that training brings to the performance issue is a focus on learning, either to enable or to enhance performance (O'Connor 1996) [9].

Ivancevich (1999) [5] defines training as the systematic process of altering the behaviour of employees in a direction that will achieve organization goals. Training is related to present job skills and abilities. It is designed to help a person continue to make positive contributions in the form of good performance, thus, has an orientation towards helping employees master the specific needed skills and abilities.

Along the same line, Byars and Rue (1984) see training as a learning process that involves an acquisition of skills, concepts, rules or attitudes to increase the service performance of the employees. Basically, it is related to the improvement of the individual's performance.

In addition, Feldman (1988) [3] claims that training can be expected to provide newcomers with information and knowledge about appropriate roles and behaviours that should lead to improve skills and abilities. It can, to a certain extent, decrease newcomers' uncertainty and anxiety.

#### *The Significance of Training : An Overview*

The need for training as to improve employees' competency levels, and in turn organizational performance, has always been an important agenda in the personnel development's perspective. However, today, the need is much greater. Workers are increasingly and constantly challenged in terms of their knowledge, skills and ability. This is because organizations and their environments are dynamic and interminably changing. The development of new technologies, competitors entering and leaving the markets, the increase of inflation and fluctuation of productivity are the examples of changes that organizations must be able to handle. Research has shown a continual need for the process of staff development, and training is seen as crucial to fulfill the organizational needs (Steward 1993 [12]; Yong 1996 [13]; O'Connors 1996 [9]; Byors and Kue 1984).

Along the same line, Byors and Kue (1984) claim that training involves an acquisition of skills, concepts, rules or attitudes to increase the service performance of the employees. Put simply, training provides learner with the knowledge and skills needed for their present jobs.

Kotter (1996) [6] proclaims that development and training are important elements as organizations attempt to gain a competitive advantage. Every business operates to make profit. A business cannot sustain profit seeking alone as a long term objective unless management supports the goals assuring sustaining quality and customers' satisfaction. Thus, training is no longer a luxury for huge organizations but a necessity. This is supported by Tracey and Tews (1995), Palcicio et al (1986), Atkinson et al (1987) [1] and Lipman (1989), to name a few.

O'Connor (1996) [9] describes that in any organization, there is a constant change of the new - employees are asked to take on new tasks, new job responsibilities to be met and new areas of business the organization has decided to get into or perhaps whole new businesses. New tools and new processes are continually being introduced into the workplace. In all these cases, people need to acquire new knowledge or master new skills. That is to say, they need to learn in order to perform and in order for the organization to perform.

Besides the introduction of new technologies, changes in business conditions such as competitors entering and leaving markets, inflation increasing and productivity fluctuating, require high capability of the human assets of the organization. Neglected investment in human resources leads to negative long-term consequences. The short term positive effect is massively outweighed by long-term deterioration in management quality (Ivancevich 1999) [5].

Henkoff (1993) [4] notes that organizations are increasingly responding to and addressing these demands in the form of training. Thus, firms, such as Pizza Hut has adopted the policy of establishing well-regarded 'good' training program so as to retain, develop and motivate staff. Training is seen as a tool to that can communicate this strategy throughout the organization, help over resistance to change, and provide the knowledge and skills people need to proceed.

In the local scene, Yong (1996) [13] in his book, *Malaysian Human Resource Management*, supports this need. He mentions that the government, as single largest employer of 850,000 civil servants in the country, has for a long time recognized the importance of training and development for its employees. It is further stated that if employees' performance can be enhanced from training, the quality of the services in the public sector will be improved. In realization of this, in the 7<sup>th</sup> Malaysian Plan [11], education and skill training are, thus, accorded high priority in nation-building in order to provide a sufficient pool of well-educated, highly skilled and strongly motivated labour, and to produce responsible citizens with high moral and ethical value. This is also one of the major reasons why the

Human Resources Development Fund in Malaysia is set up – to encourage organizations to train their employees.

Since this picture has painted a crucial need of training in any organization, that it helps to improve the quality of its employees, there is a vital need to establish what are considered as 'good' and effective training programmes so as to retain, develop and motivate them. However, training programmes can be very costly. Hence, the participants of a training programme should benefit to the maximum; that it should be able to provide necessary knowledge and skills to the employees and at the same time provide mutual satisfaction for the organization, not only in terms of the programme's worth, but also to determine employees' service quality.

#### *Objective Of Study*

The objectives of the study were:

- to identify the relationship between training and service productivity of the rank and file employees in 3-star hotels in Kuantan;
- to determine the management's perception towards training activities for its subordinates;
- to find out the perception of the rank and file employees of training and development.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

#### *Scope*

The scope of the study concentrated on the training aspiration and experience of 3-star hotels in Kuantan towards their rank and file employees especially in developing their skills towards a better service productivity.

#### *Sample*

The sample size of this study was 120 rank and file employees who are working with five 3-star hotels in Kuantan, that is, Mega View Hotel, City View Hotel, Grand Continental Hotel, Shahzan Hotel, and Seri Malaysia Hotel in the department of Front Office, Housekeeping and Food and Beverage.

#### *Instrumentation*

A series of questionnaire were distributed to these rank and file employee currently working in these five hotels (20 questionnaire for each hotel). The purpose of the questionnaire was to get the employees' feedback regarding the importance of training and its relationship towards a better service productivity. The types of questions structured in this study were close-ended and open-ended questions.

A face-to-face and telephone interviews were used to gather information from the Human Resource Managers of Vistana Hotel, Grand Continental Hotel and Mega View Hotel.

#### *Data Collection*

Questionnaires were distributed personally to 100 randomly selected rank and file employees of these hotels. The respondents were given a duration of seven days to answer the questions and the questionnaires were then collected from the Human Resource Department. However, only 80 questionnaires were able to be collected as 20 failed to return the questionnaires.

Two series of interviews were conducted face-to-face with the Human Resource Manager of Seri Malaysia Hotel and Grand Continental while one interview via telephone was conducted with the Human Resource Manager of Mega View Hotel.

#### *Analysis of Data*

The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Packages for Social Science) software.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings are arranged in the manner stated below based on the objectives set earlier

Correlation analysis of identified variables to identify the relationship between training and better service productivity. These relationship are identified using the SPSS software:

*Positive Relationship Between “Developing Themselves Through Training” AND “Service Better Through Training”*

Mean score for the above finding is 1.02 where the mode is YES as the respondents agree that they could see development in themselves through training and service would be better through training. This shows a very strong relationship between both questions as they see the development in themselves and better service through training. The correlation coefficient of the relationship is 1.000. The correlation is highly significant at the point of 0.00,  $p < 0.01$ . Refer Table 1.

Table 1: Relationship Between “Developing Themselves Through Training” AND “Service Better Through Training”

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation	Significant
Develop myself through training	1.02	0.14	1.000**	0.000
Service Better Through training	1.02	0.14	1.000**	0.000

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*Direct “Relationship Between Training & Better Service” and “Training Enhance Work Performance”*

Most of the respondents strongly agree that they see relationship between training and better service. They also strongly agree that training would enhance their work performance. The majority of the respondents strongly agree with both questions that show a direct relationship between training and better service in enhancing work performance. The correlation coefficient of the relationship is 0.621. The correlation is highly significant at the point of 0.000,  $p < 0.01$ . Refer Table 2.

Table 2: Relationship Between “Training & Better Service” and “Training Enhance Work Performance”

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation	Significant
Develop myself through training	1.58	0.54	1.621**	0.000
Service Better Through training	1.48	0.58	1.621**	0.000

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*Direct Relationship Between “Training Important To Staff” and “Employees with Better Skills Serve Better”*

Mean score for (a) is 1.17 where the mode is STRONGLY AGREE while mean score for (b) is 1.35 where the mode is STRONGLY AGREE as well. This shows that the respondents strongly agree that training is important to all operating staffs and employee with better skills will serve better. This shows strong relationship between training and service productivity. The correlation coefficient of the relationship is 0.604. The correlation is highly significant at the point of 0.000;  $p < 0.01$ . Refer Table 3.

Table 3: Relationship Between “Training Important To Staff” and “Employees with Better Skills Serve Better”

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation	Significant
Training Important To staff	1.17	0.38	0.604**	0.000
Employees with better skills serve better	1.35	0.48	0.604**	0.000

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*Positive Relationship Between “Specific Training For Specific Positions” AND “Employees With Better Skills Will Serve Better”*

Mean score for (a) is 1.27 where the mode is STRONGLY AGREE while mean score for (b) is 1.35 where the mode is STRONGLY AGREE as well. This shows that the respondents strongly agree that specific training for specific positions are needed as it is related that employee with better skills will serve better. This shows a direct relationship between training and service productivity when employees with better skills will serve better. The correlation coefficient of the relationship is 0.444. The correlation is significant at the point of 0.002;  $p < 0.01$ . Refer Table 4.

Table 4: Relationship Between “Specific Training For Specific Positions” AND “Employees With Better Skills Will Serve Better”

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation	Significant
Specific training specific position	1.27	0.54	0.444**	0.002
Employee with better service serve better	1.35	0.48	0.444**	0.002

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The analysis based on the interview held with the three general managers to determine the managements' perception towards training activities for their subordinates reveals that the management of the hotels feels that training could be done informally during daily routine work. However, this fails due to the nature of business, which requires them to work and serve all the time. In the mean time, the management agrees that there is a relationship between training and better service productivity among employees especially the rank and file employees.

On the other hand, the management mentions that specific training for specific positions could not be done due to budget constraints. This factor is also due to the pinching activities among hotels, resulting in the rank and file employees turning to other hotels that give better offer after training. Training is, thus, seen as useless due to the fact that hotels experience high turnover in a month.

For these reasons, the management prefers to proceed on other motivational activities in developing their employees' morale and services by giving extra benefits and compensation.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From the findings, there are several conclusions that could be derived. The need for training is crucial as it serves as a continual process in employees' development to fulfill the organization's need. This refers to the upgrading skills and knowledge especially in a service-oriented organization where better service productivity is stressed and important. Training serves more than a tool to upgrade skills and most importantly, it reflects the services of the employees in the hotel.

Thus, it can be concluded that almost all of the respondents agree that training leads to better service productivity. It can also be concluded that there is a direct and strong relationship between training and better service productivity. These reliable and valid findings also show that training is needed to improve service productivity and encourage employees to perform better. It cannot be denied that training helps employees in understanding their jobs. It also serves to enhance responsiveness towards customers and better service productivity.

The responses show that the employees look forward to get new knowledge and skills through training which would bring positive effects to their service productivity. However, it is sad that the management fails to see the importance of training from its employees' perception in upgrading the service productivity. Eventhough the management agrees that there are relationships between training and better service productivity, the organizations still are not keen enough to conduct specific training for its rank and file employees. This is mainly due to the financial constraints where budget is allocated to daily operation and not employees' development, and pinching activities faced by the organization. Although the employees grade the employers' level of commitment towards them as satisfactory, they still believe and suggest that training would help employees in serving the organizations better, besides creating a happy working environment.

These two different perceptions will soon end up with frustration that in turn affects the service productivity of the employees. This is mainly because the employees feel that training is important in developing their skills towards better service productivity, unfortunately, however, at the same time employers failed to fulfill this need.

These findings, thus, recommend that organizations should look into training seriously to sharpen their employers' skills and motivate them. The organizations may start by listening to the employees on their eagerness to attend training to get more knowledge and experience. The management should also do greater study on training and its relation in developing skills towards better service productivity by getting help from training consultancy services.

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