Chapter 15
Managerial Competencies Related to Soft Skills: An Investigation of Hotel Management in Asia

Nuttawuth Muenjohn
RMIT University, Australia

Alan Montague
RMIT University, Australia

Lynnel Hoare
RMIT University, Australia

Jiaying Zhang
RMIT University, Australia

ABSTRACT

In line with the rapid development of the tourism industry globally, the hotel sector in particular has experienced a period of enormous economic development during the last two decades. Correspondingly, the demand for talented professionals in management roles has increased significantly. Based on this, the results of this research effective “soft skills”, also referred to as people or interpersonal skills, are viewed as essential skills to employment in hotel managerial roles by the senior managerial informants working in this industry sector. This paper reviews and investigates the soft skills that are identified as essential for managers in international hotels. This exploratory study adopted a qualitative methodology. Seventeen semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers within hotel groups in six countries. The study focuses on soft skills necessary for managers in the industry and the region from multiple perspectives.

INTRODUCTION

With decades of booming development, tourism has become the largest industry in the world. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2013), international tourism receipts totaled US$1.159 billion ($1,159,000,000,000) and international tourist arrivals totaled 1,087 million in 2013. Along with such rapid development, the hotel sector has also seen a period of enormous economic development and increased patronage (UNWTO, 2013). Consequently, the demand for professional management tal-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-2160-0.ch015
Managerial Competencies Related to Soft Skills

ent, especially among middle managers, has increased significantly. This demand has seen the need to recognise the “frontline” management and interpersonal skill development of all staff, particularly middle managers as leaders. Continuous learning and development (including training – herein after referred to as L&D in line with contemporary practice) are essential functions of leadership development and are vital to sustainability of managers’ skill sets and career progression, in line with industry demand. Kotey & Sheridan (2004) suggested that L&D is a leadership application that can be used to increase the power of competition in businesses. Employees need to develop knowledge about their working systems, and also develop the skills that enable them to stimulate added productivity (Sezer, 2009).

The great majority of global, contemporary management, and leadership learning and development theories and methods has been, and continues to be, developed in the ‘West’, predominantly in the United States (Caganova, Cambal, & Weidlichova, 2015). Most multi-national corporations adopt these practices with little cultural or national contextualization and export the associated theories, techniques, models and tools (e.g., performance appraisal, assessment centers) around the globe and, in this case, specifically to Asia. However many of these organisational development processes have been less than successful in divergent cultural settings and many researchers claim that culture plays a distinct role in acceptance of, or resistance to, leadership learning and development interventions (e.g., Freeman et al., 2009).

While there is a significant body of literature that analyses Asian learning preferences and another that analyses global diversity and cross-cultural development (e.g., Freeman 2009; Ramburuth & Welch, 2005), a limited understanding of Asian leadership and management development practices and theories persists. The potential of global application of Asian leadership styles and practices is an added problem due to limited academic commentary on this important issue. In order to obtain a better understanding of the soft-skills of leadership practiced in Asian hotels, this chapter reviewed the skill-sets that were identified as essential by functional managers in a selection of international hotels within the region. The findings of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of leadership and management. In addition, this study also has practical significance in its provision of recommendations for leadership and management development content for staff who work in hotels in the South East Asian region, or people who are responsible for the development of those who work in this industry sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

People Development in Asian Hotels

Over the last decade, the hospitality industry in Asia has grown substantially due to the expansion of economies and increase in purchasing powers of local people leading to growth in traveling demand (UNWTO, 2013). The World Tourism Organization (2013, p. 4) reported that the Asia and the Pacific region, among all the areas recorded, posted a record as the fastest growth region given a ‘7% increase in international arrivals, or 16 million more.’ At the same time, the six countries which were the focus of our research being China, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, and Vietnam were among the world’s top tourism destinations (UNWTO, 2013). For instance, China and Malaysia ranked third and ninth, respectively, in 2011 (UNWTO, 2013). The increase in both inbound and outbound tourism has provided considerable opportunity for international hotel groups to expand their business in this region (Jogaratnam & Tse, 2004).