

# Human Resources Empowerment and Its Role in the Sustainable Tourism

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## Abstract

During the last decades, the tendency of tourism sector development has been manifested obviously, considering training and empowering human resources involved in this industry, especially in the most industrialized countries. This research aims to study the role of human resource empowerment in the development of tourism industry. After clarifying the concept of empowerment, its importance and its role in sustainable development, the objectives of tourism industry and winning customers' satisfaction in tourist environments by means of enhancing job satisfaction, innovation and creativity at work, problem solving, ... are determined.

The results from the research showed that the present organizations across the world have some strong tendency to empower their personnel to increase efficiency and improve working systems. It was also suggested that the management and personnel would better have short term, long term and professional training courses in order to better perform their tasks.

**Keywords:** Tourism industry, Human resource empowerment, Sustainable tourism, Training

## 1. Introduction

The concept of sustainable development was first given prominence at the UNCED (United Nation). In 1987, Sustainable Development was defined by the world commission on the Environment and Development (in the Brundtland Report) as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs" (Note 1). Unfortunately this definition remained vague and little guidance was offered on how countries could develop coherent sustainable development policies (Note 2).

There are a myriad of definitions for Sustainable Tourism, including eco-tourism, green travel, environmentally and culturally responsible tourism, fair trade and ethical travel. The most widely accepted definition is that of the World Tourism Organization. They define sustainable tourism as "tourism which leads to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems." In addition they describe the development of sustainable tourism as a process which meets the needs of present tourists and host communities whilst protecting and enhancing needs in the future (World Tourism Organisation 1996). Sustainability in factors such as social, environmental and economic balance in the long run is a vital concern of the present private and state organizations. Entering the twenty first century, this has become even more critical for modern societies.

One of the most important issues in everlasting progress of an organization or any business is the human resources involved in the businesses. Taking into account the constant achievements of organizations like Coca-Cola, Kodak, Intel, Phillips and the experience of countries that have been successful in tourism industry in the past few decades proves the core of their constant progress has been the evolution of their empowered human

resources. Considering the multidimensional objectives set to develop the tourism industry, the human factor is of the most crucial element in attaining these objectives and the unrelenting success of these organizations.

## 2. The Importance of Empowerment

Restructuring of the global economy is the main factor affecting the future of sustainable development, major changes are needed in the human behavior, in the system of values and life style. Empowerment has been described as a venue to enable employees make decisions (Bowen & Lawler, 1992) and as a personal experience where individuals take responsibility for their own actions (Pastor, 1996). The first definition puts the onus on management, and the second emphasizes the importance of the individual for successful application of empowerment. Whereas, earlier research focused on empowerment as a set of management practices to delegate authority (discretionary empowerment) (Blau & Alba, 1982), recent research has centered on psychological empowerment, focusing on employee experience (Corsun & Enz, 1999).

Empowerment research in hospitality and tourism is very limited (Erstad, 1997). Managerial interest in employee empowerment in the hospitality industry has been associated with gaining competitive advantage through improvements in service quality (Hubrecht & Teare, 1993). Fulford and Enz (1995) suggested that different subject groups in the service industry should be studied to learn more about the concept and practice of empowerment.

Going over the accomplishments of the developed countries, institutions and great corporations in the world reveals the fact that the innovative, expertise and motivated human forces and the way they are organized are the propelling forces behind all these achievements. A glimpse at the improvements in offering generous supports, services and hospitality of countries such as France, Spain and Turkey available to tourists in recent years proves that the human resources are the key factor.

In today's competitive world, for any industry to survive and ceaselessly grow, creative empowered human resources are the central pillars and in fact the real assets of any organization. This progress would have been impossible without the skilled empowered human forces.

One of the most obvious obsessions of the present day businesses is the ability to employ and bring to together talented manpower who are in turn able to bring about changes in the organizations they work for, In fact, in a successful organization there is a combination of knowledgeable and well-endowed groups of people who feel they belong to the same family and by working passionately and ingeniously apply their experience and knowledge in teamwork to add prosperity and success to their organizations. Assuming responsibility, teamwork spirit, problem solving talents, bringing about change and variety, innovation and creative thinking and making proper decisions are of the most important characteristics of noble empowered human resources that are the prerequisite requirements of any business to remain consistently successful in the present era.

## 3. Empowered Human Recourses Functions

The role that empowering human resources can play in tourism industry to sustain a constant success in different frameworks can be outlined as below:

- ❖ Providing standard services in tourist resorts and sights to satisfy the customers;
- ❖ Providing services according to the requirements of tourists;
- ❖ Better communication between the personnel themselves and the personnel and the management;
- ❖ Increasing job satisfaction and having a dynamic workplace within the tourist environments;
- ❖ Increasing productivity and efficiency of the private and public personnel involved in tourism industry;
- ❖ Taking advantage of creativity and innovation while working;
- ❖ Feeling the sense of belonging to the organization and doing teamwork;
- ❖ Improving the quality of doing the work
- ❖ Enhancing the services provided to the tourists in the tourist environments;
- ❖ Lowering the costs and increasing profitability of businesses involved in tourism;
- ❖ Improving the power of decision making within the personnel;
- ❖ Reaching the long term and short term goals set in tourism industry to earn more currency exchange and improve economic development.

#### **4. The Objectives of Tourism Industry**

Tourism industry is the most cultural issue of economy. Economic experts believe that tourism is only a part of the economy, which is greatly tied up with culture, because on one hand it provides desirably the introduction of cultures, civilizations, races, lands, tribes and different dialects with each other and on the other hand it can also be a resource of income for different countries. As tourism economy is the best stimulus for the countries that have a decreasing industry due to possessing a single product or limited sources of income, it is becoming one of the largest economic realities for developing countries (Padash and Esfahani, 2008).

Today private and public tourist sectors aim at establishing fundamental transportation systems, creating tourist attractions, purposeful promotions, economic development, investing in the standard tourist products, earning exchange currency incomes, and planned dynamic regional and worldwide marketing. To accomplish all these goals, human resources in public and private sectors must be empowered.

#### **5. Winning Customers' Satisfaction in Tourist Environments**

One of the most important achievements in empowering the personnel is how to win customers' satisfaction. In fact, this will lead to sustainable progress in both private and public sectors (in market places, public services, hotels and restaurants). It is related to the mission of tourist organizations in creating the right jobs, educating and empowering the workforce in areas where tourists come and go.

In order to win customers' satisfaction, good services must be provided. This will attract more tourists and lead to earning more income and, as a result, the increase in revenues will, in turn, help to develop economic activity in the region and create more productive jobs.

In most of the successful chain hotels all over the world, one of the hotel's crew will ask the guests about their opinions about the services available to them, whether they need extra help or everything has been directed according to their requirements and if they are satisfied with the range of services provided. In fact these empowered crew can be personally responsible for particular requirements of their guests or their complaints. When the managers and personnel are authorized in the tourist environments, they can provide high quality services at reasonable costs. They know that the satisfaction of the customers is of the most important priority. Both public and private organizations that deal with tourists know that the provision of qualitative services to investors and any client in economic and tourist quarters play an important role in attracting new investors and tourists, and hence will result in the economic growth and future development of the region.

A second debate within the literature pertains to the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. Satisfied customers tend to be loyal to the company and more likely to return (Greenwell et al., 2002).

Managers in tourism strive to improve the quality of their services and the level of customer satisfaction in the belief that this effort will create loyal visitors. Loyal visitors will return to the destination and recommend it to others (Tian-Cole & Crompton, 2003).

Sparks and Westgate (2002) suggest that service failure can have devastating effects on an organization because customers frequently switch to a different provider when they experience a service failure. However, among customers who experience service problems, those who receive satisfactory resolution are more likely to remain loyal to the service provider.

Services forces, such as taxi drivers, when briefed, can have pleasant encounters with tourists while they are entering a tourist zone, will have a tremendous positive impact on them and this will boost sustainable progress in the same region.

As a matter of fact, all the private and public sectors employees active in tourist environments should know that they are all the circle of chains joined together as a strong member of a system. Their coordinated cooperation to win tourists' satisfaction will help the constant success in the tourism of a particular region.

#### **6. Provision of Optimum Services to Tourists**

There is no doubt that providing good services to gain advantage over other businesses in the realm of economic activities are of the greatest factors. Tourist organizations aim at attracting tourists and entrepreneurs to tourist resorts or historical sights by empowering the human resources in the public and private sector tourist organizations is of the prime importance. In fact the whole burden of attracting tourists and foreign or domestic investors to a particular region lies on the shoulders of empowered personnel who, in turn, try to provide good services in order to make them their lifelong customers. An increase in the number of tourists and investors will

obviously lead to improvements in employment, income and the development of the region and hence to sustained progress.

### **7. Enhancing Job Satisfaction**

By providing efficient services and gaining clients' satisfaction, empowered employees will add their own satisfaction as well. In fact those who are the master of the job and can be more responsive toward their customers are more relaxed and feel less strain and enjoy their work and the working environment better than any other employees. Having happy and empowered employees is a blessing for an organization and will bring about abundance and everlasting success to it. In any position, if the employee is impotent and cannot fulfill expectations he will become bored and eventually dragged out of the system. People who do a job uninterestedly and work merely out of financial necessity (such as waiters in a restaurant or hotel crew) are not empowered because they lack the motivation and may therefore, be pernicious to the whole system. For this reason, organizations must plan to, motivate and empower their personnel if they want to succeed in a competitive market.

### **8. Teamwork and the Feeling of Belonging to the Organization**

The empowered management and personnel do not consider themselves separate from the system that their organization is based on. They rather feel that what they do is a part of an integrated whole to sense the feel of belonging to an organization or subdivisions and having common interests and objectives with others leads to overall achievements of that particular organization and boosts the regions development. For instance, in the whole lot of hotels, shopping centers, tourist sights and wherever visited by tourists, if people involved are empowered by public or private organizations, the tourists or investors can have a pleasant memory from the region and this will encourage positive promotions abroad or in the country and attract many tourists and investors to that particular area and of course, again, it can increase employment, rapid regional development and sustained progress.

### **9. Innovation and Creativity at Work**

Innovation and creativity is peculiar to human individuals and societies. In the present era, innovation is the most important criterion in corporate development. With the present rush to introduce new products and services to the markets, the organizations that cannot cope with everlasting changes that happen every second and do not have creative staff are bound to failure. Innovation cannot be sold or bought. It is a phenomenon potentially inherited by all human beings. People should welcome new ideas; organizations can creatively trigger this great hidden potential; and positive environment would motivate the personnel to think profoundly and unleash their creative abilities.

Tourist organizations all over the world require highly innovative empowered manpower to attract tourists and investors to their regions. Nowadays the revenue from tourism industry account for the most part of same countries' annual budget. They not only invest in the provision of services but also encourage tourist organizations to employ and train innovative personnel.

Innovations in this field may take place in the following forms:

- ❖ Innovations in providing high quality services;
- ❖ Innovations in attracting national and international investments;
- ❖ Innovations in obliging hotels and resorts to provide the best possible services;
- ❖ Innovations in supervising public and private sectors to provide the tourists with the best services possible;
- ❖ Innovations in selling goods and services to domestic and foreign tourists at reasonable prices;

These innovations and creative ideas in tourist organizations will pave the way for growth, development and sustainable progress.

### **10. Problem Solving**

Empowering the personnel working in an organization will make them capable of finding solutions to problems or improve the existing set-ups. One of the first effects of empowering the personnel is the changes in their behavior for the better. These changes will naturally help to maintain a potential capacity to solve problems in the organization. The empowered personnel, whether they work for private or state tourist organizations, can have a holistic and cooperative outlook in detecting and shooting problems in different parts of their organization. Spotting the problems and finding quick solutions is no easy job; only the skillful and experienced people who

believe in teamwork can find reliable solutions to the problems that are always faced by any organization. If the personnel are not trained and empowered to overcome difficult situations, they tend to whitewash the problems instead of solving them and this will certainly deter the situation and puts organizations in jeopardy. Constant growth and sustainable progress in the tourism industry can only be achieved by creative and empowered personnel, just as in any other industry.

### 11. Authorization

One of the most important accomplishments resulting from empowering personnel is authorization. Authorization will bring about ample benefits and advantages for organizations and people who are working for them, because in this way they will be able to increase output and make the organization grow faster. By giving authorization:

- ✓ The human resources will feel free to think independently, track down the obstacles and difficulties for themselves and therefore increase output and the quality of their work;
- ✓ All the people will know what to do within the range of their authority and no one will be baffled or confused;
- ✓ People who are given authorization are less prone to run into difficulties;
- ✓ Inefficient personnel can be identified and sorted out;
- ✓ Employees usually do teamwork and can improve their knowledge and gain more insights into what they are doing;
- ✓ The budget that is allocated to giving extra benefits and facilities can be invested in training groups of employees to maintain an increase in output and efficiency of the organization;

Intelligent and empowered management and giving authorization to personnel may lead to constant progress in tourist organizations.

### 12. Conclusion

There is a strong tendency in present organizations across the world to empower their personnel to increase efficiency and improve working systems. In this highly competitive world, countries and private organizations have begun to realize how innovative and empowered staff can help boost tourism industry in a particular region. Without this, one cannot expect higher employment, currency exchange revenues, high quality services, enhanced productivity and sustainable progress in tourist promotions to attract more tourists' areas. There are world wide and investment to areas worth sightseeing and entertainment.

The management and personnel must have short term, long term and on the job training. The interaction of state owned organizations, private organizations, universities and other educational institutions, and local people can have accelerating effects on promoting the quality and quantity of services and consequent progress in tourist regions. The quality of services given by hotels, tourist resorts and facilities en route must be supervised by experienced and knowledgeable managers. There must be commitments to improve such facilities without delay. The authorities must try to inform people how to interact with foreign tourists. Some regions might still be unexplored in relation to their potential value to absorb tourists and investors. Sometimes a new archeological discovery can attract the attention of many tourists, provided there are enough promotions inside and outside the country.

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### Notes

Note 1. [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)

Note 2. A Usha: [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=955789](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=955789)