

Analysis of Training and Development Activities in Tourism Sector of UAE

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Abstract

UAE has second largest economy after Saudi Arabia in the Arab World. The reason behind its growth is diversification. Among other GCC countries, the economy of UAE is more diverse and developed. Although it is the most diversified economy, UAE heavily relies on oil. Realizing this problem, Dubai has taken steps to free itself from relying on the only source of revenue. As a result, with the exception of Dubai, most of the UAE is dependent on oil revenues.

Dubai has developed itself over the past few years. Understanding its strategic geographic position and the advantage of being the transit destination of many flights across the world, Dubai developed itself rapidly to become one of the most important tourist destinations on the world tourist map. The region has now become an attraction for business people, tourists and shoppers.

This report will highlight the importance of tourism sector in UAE and how it has grown over the past years. With the growth in tourism industry, employment opportunities increased in the economy. The report will shed some light on how UAE has been able to train and develop the employees who play an important role in developing the tourism sector.

2. Introduction

2.1 Background discussion

2.1.1 Brief definition of the concept

Training and development include the set of ongoing educational and practical activities which help the employees refine existing skills or gain new skills according to the need of the changing external environment of competition or the internal working environment of the organization. The methods being used for each organization belonging to a specific industry varies according to the need of that organization and the nature of employees.

2.1.2 Importance and previous researches

Training and development of employees using different methods and tactics is very beneficial to businesses particularly in boosting their level of productivity. Previous researches have shown that training and development at individual level will gradually contribute to macro level, making the whole economy of UAE prosperous with higher and continuously improving levels of productivity. Training methods vary according to the nature of each business or industry. The company belonging to a particular industry might train its entire employment staff or train and focus on the development of only the long term employees, ignoring the casual employees. Also researches have shown that training entire staff on some specific ground is more beneficial than only staying focused on some classes of employees.

2.1.3 Importance of tourism sector in UAE

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Tourism sector has played a vital role in UAE's economy since the development of breath taking tourist attractions in the country. It has been focusing to stand out among the famous countries of the world and because of this aim, the country has succeeded in attracting a tremendous number of tourists. In 2002, 4.7 million people chose emirate as a location of their holiday. This number increased to 10 million the previous year and the government aims to double this number by 2020. Expo 2020 will play a real motivator for the country to achieve this impossible target with in this short period of time.

2.1.4 Employment in tourism sector of UAE

Travel & Tourism sustained approximately 518,000 jobs in 2014 in UAE. Tourism sector of UAE employs twice the number of employees as in the educational sector. The tourism sector generated 9.2% of employment in UAE as per 2014.

2.1.5 Training and development activities in tourism sector

Along with the development of these tourist attractions comes the responsibility to deal with that large number of tourists as well and for that training and development of the employees recruited in this sector holds a noticeable importance. This will surely need a more diversified and structured training and development activities for the employees in this most important sector, which has a major chunk in the overall health of the UAE's economy.

2.2 Problem Statement

The researcher would like to analyze training and development activities in tourism sector of UAE.

2.3 Study Objective

The purpose of this report is to analyze the training and development activities in travel & tourism sector of UAE. With growth, how UAE is training its work force in tourism sector to meet the expectations of one of the fastest growing economies for businesses and traveling destinations?

2.4 Significance of Study

This research study is conducted to analyze the training and development activities in the tourism sector of UAE. Since UAE is one of the fastest growing economies attracting millions of tourist from all over the world, training and development of employees to meet the bench marking standards is a crucial task to fulfill. This study will help in learning how UAE has been able to manage the growing demands of economy through training and development activities and what else is needed to fill the gaps which are overlooked.

3. Literature

Researchers have found that training programs, if implemented the right way, do impact the employees' level of efficiency thus affecting the overall productivity level, as discussed earlier in the introduction phase of the research. The research conducted by experts also explains that effective training and development helps the management to retain the current employees of the organization (Becker, 1993; Colarelli & Montei 1996). Most of the experts also agree that training of employees is very complicated practice of human resource that can directly influence the accomplishment of organization's ultimate goals. Organizations today are struggling to overcome the competition and stand out from their rivals on the basis of information, abilities and enthusiasm of their work force. All this is not a natural process, employees need to be trained to develop these unique skills in order to help the organization succeed in differentiation.

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Research conducted by Basma Kashmoola from Lecturer-College of Business, University of Modern Sciences Dubai- United Arab Emirates on 16th April 2016 explains the importance, benefits and methods used by the organizations (public or in private sector in UAE). According to the research there are two types of training, general and specific. General training includes whole staff of company, both long term and short term. Specific training, involves only long term or permanent employees.

Huang (2000) found a huge gap between trained and untrained employees of UAE. The trained employees possessed many characteristics that were lacking in untrained employees. The trained ones were time conscious, while the untrained employees would report to work either late or early, along with irregular departure time. The untrained employees were also engaged in activities not related to job or business. Therefore, there is a need for training in order to achieve productivity targets. Well trained employees are the future and existing assets for the company, but both general and specific employees are important to the organization. According to Basma's model training and development include knowledge for instance ,all the locations where tourist go, English language, mental and physical preparation for the long day job etc.

A current report prepared by the American Society for Training and Development explains that the spending of organizations is greater than \$126 billion annually on the worker's training and development (Paradise, 2007). Kottke (1999) explains that worker development programs must be formed with vital proficiencies and right structure as with their help organizations develop to corporate level. According to him the basic function of these programs should be to gain right knowledge, mutual cooperation, innovative mindset and quick problem solving. Also it has been evaluated that employees will be more effective and efficient in delivering the assigned tasks and other responsibility related to job performance, if right training is provided to them according to the need of training (Ghani, 2014).

Today's business market in all fields is filled with competition, and ongoing technological advancements (Aragon-Sanchez et al., 2003; Lin & Jacobs 2008). As a result of this the training provisions and requirements have evolved in all the sectors of businesses (Patton et al., 2000; Saunders, 2000; Huang, 2001; Dewhurst et al., 2007), and suggested that right now there is a lack of empirical proof explaining a link between training and the business performance. Moreover, the link which already exists is not conclusive in nature.

As per the article written by Anderson, Provis, and Chappel (2016), many employees in the tourism industry can be classified as front line service employees, because their jobs involve direct customer contact. These front line employees need a more structured training as they are the one who welcome the tourists and lay an initial impression of the overall country. Training of these employees play a crucial role in the success of overall aim of achieving desired outcomes in this sector. In these sectors major training includes "emotional labor" training, which refers to as the effort, planning and control needed to display the emotion or attitude which is a necessity as per organizational requirements and individual job performance requirements. When the employees are trained efficiently in this vital area along with other areas then it will ultimately ensure the delivery of quality service along with effective on the job performance, which is actually linked with the success of overall tourism business. This then eventually will contribute to the overall economy building of UAE.

The employees in the tourism sector are trained differently according to the requirement of the organization. In an article published in the Insight magazine of Dubai, Fatima Al Mehli, (Industry and Tourist Guide Training Unit Head, Tourism & Culture Authority Abu Dhabi.) it was asked that how the workers are trained and how they develop certain skills in the industry.

Her answer was, “We believe human capital is the Authority’s most valuable asset to achieve its goals and strategies. Learning map has been developed to evaluate employee competencies and identify training methods and techniques required to develop a group of experienced and qualified employees”. She also said, “Training workshops and seminars as well as research initiatives in collaboration with local and international educational institutions are arranged for the employees to learn and improve their skills and competencies”. She also mentioned the names of educational institutions with which they were in collaboration to train the employees and other professionals i.e. University of Lausanne, Cornell University, the School of Events, Tourism & Hospitality at Leeds Beckett University, and the School of Hotel & Tourism Management at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

In this research document we have focused on analyzing specifically the activities which play important role in training and development of the employees working in travel and tourism sector of UAE.

4. Research Methodology

The United Arab Emirates is one of the world's fastest-growing destinations for business and leisure visitors. This is hardly surprising since geographically, economically and culturally, it is in a unique strategic position between East and West. The travel and tourism sector has flourished in the past years as the economy bloomed with tourists.

With the growth in the economy, employment also rose in tourism sector. This report will highlight the research findings of “training and development activities in travel and tourism sector of UAE”.

4.1 Data Collection Method

The research is done through descriptive research where various relevant authentic articles, reports and research papers are studied.

4.2 Data Analysis

As mentioned earlier, the data will be collected through descriptive research. Since the data is qualitative, for this report it will include content analysis of written data, and conclusions will be drawn accordingly.

5. Findings

Organizations in tourism sector nowadays are using information technology systems for the employees training programs. These programs are helpful in training the employees, developing job related skills, enhancing knowledge and improving competencies. These programs help in increasing the productivity of the tourism business and provides a basis for millions of tourists to visit UAE. Well trained tourist guides and employees in tourism sector help the tourists to get higher value along with great experience, they eventually return to their native homes with a bunch of satisfactory feelings and memorable moments. Designing of training programs and their implementation might be costly, but UAE realizes the value of the results gained after a well trained staff in the tourism sector delivers great performance indirectly or directly making the country earn profit.

5.1 terms and conditions

To work as an employee in the tourism sector of UAE one has to fulfill the following required conditions. These terms and conditions are set by the authority of Tourism Council of UAE. (listed below are some of the important ones)

1. The courses are open to qualified employees to enhance the skills in Dubai tourism knowledge with the aim of becoming licensed tourism employee e.g. tourist guide.

2. The applicants must maintain an acceptable level of academic qualification along with professional occupation.
3. A minimum of a high school level certificate or any equivalent level of document is a necessity before training.
4. The applicant should have an acceptable level of written and spoken skills in English majorly along with other specified languages as per the requirement of the job.
5. At the time of application, the applicant must possess valid passport along with valid residence visa.
6. All the applicant should present a valid certificate as a proof of good conduct, issued from Dubai Police. (home country issued certificates are not acceptable)
7. If the applicant faces rejection, then he or she can reapply after six months of rejection. (with valid certification or any other proof of increase in the standards which caused rejection in first place)
8. Submission of original passport and documentation is a necessity. In case of submitting any false paper, the applicant may be dismissed and will be permanently deprived from reapplying.
9. Successful applicant will be asked to pay a onetime fee (non-refundable) upon registration.
10. For renewal of licenses, candidates need to return the expired license for retrieving the renewed one. In the case of expired license being lost, a police report shall be required.

5.2 Share of tourism sector in the economy and GDP of UAE

Dubai is considered as the most flocked cities around the world and the main reason behind this is the contribution from tourism and hospitality sector to the country's economy and GDP. In 2013, around 8 million people visited Dubai either for leisure or work purpose and the main attraction sites for them were the beaches, museums, parks and other places of entertainment.

In 2013, Dubai's hospitality sector accounted for 5% in GDP as compared to 4.6 % in 2012 and this increase in GDP due to contribution from the hospitality sector is mainly from hotels and restaurants. Tourism has an important part in the country's economic growth and according to reports 20-30% of Dubai's GDP is related to the tourism sector, which includes transportation, impact on retail and other industries and services. Dubai's workforce has also increased from 2012-2013 at an average of 13% per year and as per the report of 2020 Expo strategic objectives, the next 6 years of Dubai will estimate 277,000 of new jobs to be created and with that 40% will be contributed to the tourism sector.

5.3 UAE Hospitality Industry: Setting the Standards of Customer Service

When it comes to hotel revenue, 2012 saw a huge growth. A total of 5 million customers brought in a total of AED 9.7 billion which is expected to double in the year 2013. The real secret to this huge growth is Training management.

5.4 Training Management

Training management deals with a group of people who have expertise in the Hospitality sector. They have gained this expertise through years of experience working in different departments. These departments are subdivided into various divisions which include accommodations, restaurants, bars, travel & tourism, recreational facilities, gym, parlor, offices, pools and courts. All these divisions require a specific group of individuals which would mean that they cannot switch between these divisions.

Throughout the training management course, training schedules are set up to enhance the

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employee's knowledge about the customer and the services rendered to them. Also, they are trained with verbal communication tools which enable them to understand the customer needs better. This in turn enables all employees to be on the same page and set up standards which are shared through each individual of the concerned department. Training management personnel can be hired as groups or specific individuals who might specialize in a specific department to maintain the same level of standards in regards to customer service.

5.5 Industry Emiratisation

The authorities are taking proactive measures to ensure that there is a rise in the Emirati workforce in this sector as Emiratis make up 1% of the Abu Dhabi's Tourism sector. This is projected to rise as the Authorities have singled out Training as the key driving force which will give rise to more Emirati joining this sector. Also, the Authorities have created a comprehensive training plan as part of its development strategy.

The training plan also builds upon long term goals by providing World class service standards. This will be achieved by bringing in professionals through human resource management. The plan would target Emiratis so that they eventually take up key roles in the tourism sector. The plan further expands by including Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing which has established high quality training program packages targeted at Emiratis.

These programs include but are not limited to:

1. **SMART E-Suggestions System:** This system allows employees and customers to submit suggestions and ideas that are evaluated by a specialized committee who recognize and award people for their suggestions if they are implemented.
2. **Hawafeez Initiative:** This encourages employee to give in their best and continue to do so as they will be awarded for their high standards of customer service. The categories through which winners will be selected are as follows,
 - a) Distinguished Employee
 - b) Distinguished Supporting Employee
 - c) Distinguished Supervisor
 - d) Distinguished Group or Team force
 - e) Best Customer Service
 - f) Distinguished Field Employee
3. **Emtiaz Program** provides employees with discounts and special offers from selected shops, restaurants and hotels.
4. **Employee Relations** organizes many entertaining, social, sport and cultural activities that help create a positive and innovative work.

5.6 Training Solutions

Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) has an external training arm called training solutions which was setup as part of the initiative to ensure that the tourism industry of Dubai continues their world-class development of people at all levels of the organization. Training solutions is unique and different as compared to other which is delivered by colleges, universities and other training institutions because it takes the best tool and learning of the tourism and hospitality sectors and ensure relevance at every stage in the market place. Emphasis is placed on a vocational 'hands-on' approach to learning, making participants more effective and

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efficient within the workplace.

5.6.1 Programs Offered

In association with the **American Hotels and Lodging Association (AHLA)**, DTCM Training Solutions provides a wide range of hospitality related training programs, some of these programs include:

- AHLA START Program is for UAE national job-seekers who are interested to join the hospitality industry
- AHLA staff training of the front lines
- AHLA E-learning hospitality training portal
- AHLA management modules and Hospitality supervisor
- AHLA Hospitality train-the-trainer programs

5.6.2 Tourist Guide Course

Tourist Guide has been the most important training course for training solution. Tour guide plays an important role as it provides authentic information to the tourists about their destination from different parts of the world.

The department has a licensing condition for the tour guide who includes passing the training programs, reviewing and updating the programs and only then they can operate the Tour guide. These programs are conducted four times a year and also the department has licensed a total number of 1356 Tour guides including 91 UAE nationals.

5.6.3 Competitions Conducted

They are also conducting competition called Concierge of the Year over the last nine years in order to develop the skills, ability and knowledge of concierge teams of the five-star hotels in Dubai and enhance the service standards of the key area of hospitality industry.

Example Tourism Cultural Authority Abu Dhabi operates an online revenue and statistics system which is accessible through user name and password to licensed hotel establishment only. This system is used by the entire emirates hotel to submit their data regarding revenue and guests statistic information. The Authority then uses this information to produce reports in order to show Abu Dhabi's hotel performance in relation to guests, guest nights, room nights, occupancy, average length of stay and revenue (among other things). These statistics provide the Authority and our key stakeholders with valuable insights into the current performance of tourism industry and assist in the development of visitor and guest strategies.

6. Conclusion

UAE holds a special identity around the world for its famous tourist attractions and business opportunities. With the fast growing economy, it realizes the importance of training and development in tourism because now they are shifting from depending on oil and natural resources to travel and tourism. With the approaching expo 2020, UAE expects to reach its objective of attracting 20 million visitors from around the world. Tourism is a central pillar of Dubai's economic growth and diversification. The Tourism Vision for 2020 will further leverage the sector by broadening Dubai's offering across events, attractions, infrastructure, services, and packages. Part of this strategy involves adapting a marketing approach to showcase Dubai to a wider audience and increasing awareness and conversion of flight and hotel bookings ("Tourism Vision 2020", 2016).

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Knowing the importance of tourism, it has not only strived to have maximum tourist attractions and be the most visited tourist country, but has also focused on maintaining those hard achieved goals. UAE is very adaptable in terms of applying new knowledge. It continuously changes its training methods and policies to adapt to changes and move further ahead in its growth. For e.g., use of latest technology is encouraged in all sectors. Many industries are shifting their transactions to online business where they hope to provide better customer service and increase productivity.

The UAE has become a leading regional technology hub given its position as a platform for top tier international tech companies and a stage for global technology-oriented events, said its Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai. ("UAE a leading technology hub: Shaikh Mohammed - Khaleej Times", 2016).

In conclusion, UAE knows where to spend in tourism sector to help it to grow and become one of the widely visited countries from all around the world.

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