

TOURISM MANAGERS COMPETENCY A CRITICAL EVALUATION ON KERALA TOURISM

Pradeep Kumar C.*, Sakthivel, R.**, Hareesh N. Ramanathan***

**Bharathiar* University, Coimbatore Tamil Nadu, India. Email: prascropio@yahoo.com

**Assistant Professor, Govt Arts College, Coimbatore, India. Email: sakthi19_69@yahoo.co.in

***Professor and Head, Department of Management Studies, Toc H Institute of Science and Technology Kochi, Kerala, India. Email: hareeshramanathan@gmail.com

Abstract *The robust growth of tourism industry was quite satisfactory even in the toughest macroeconomic environment across the globe. Nearly 85 percent countries have reported positive growth and out of this 33 percent have recorded double digit growth. The travel and tourism industry holds tremendous potential for contributing to the Indian economy also. The Government of Kerala, by way of an aggressive marketing strategy has envisaged the achievement of a yearly growth rate of fifteen percent on foreign tourist arrivals and seven percent on domestic tourist arrivals respectively. Despite the sluggishness in targeted market, tourism operators are putting all efforts to attract tourists with innovative marketing techniques to achieve the envisaged target. Though the Government of Kerala has taken so many initiatives to reduce the gap in the man power requirement, this could not be achieved. Attrition rate of this industry has not only been causing a dent on the performance of existing staff but it has an adverse effect also in the tourism sector as a whole. Keeping this in view, a questionnaire survey was conducted among the professionals associated with tourism industry to find out the competency needs of tourism managers who can perform and meet the target in this dynamic environment. The data was subjected to statistical analysis and found the various generic and functional competencies that are required for managing the tourism industry effectively.*

Keywords: *Competency Model, Generic Competency, Technical Competency, Kerala Tourism.*

INTRODUCTION

The growth of tourism industry in India has been satisfactory even amidst the toughest global economic environment. The 85 percent of the countries reported positive growth and 33 percent recorded double digit growth (WTTC report 2012). Service sector has contributed 55.2 percent to the GDP of the country and that 66.28 percentage to the Government of Kerala during the year 2010 (Kerala Tourism policy 2012 Department of Tourism Government of Kerala). Due to its significance in terms of employment, income, regional development and foreign exchange, the Union Government has placed tourism industry in the development agenda. WTTC report 2012 indicates India as one of the world's topmost tourism growth centre in the coming decade and expected to register nine percent economic activity from travel and tourism.

Kerala is now globally positioned as one of the best tourism destinations due to its wide variety of tourism products like backwater tourism, Ayurveda rejuvenation, wildlife, beaches, pilgrimage, adventure tourism, eco tourism, house boating, cruise tourism, hill stations etc. National Geographic Traveler has listed Kerala as one among the

ten paradises of the world and one of the fifty must see destinations of the life time. Kerala has topped among Indian tourism destinations in Google's search trend for the year 2012. Identified as a prime area of focus, the tourism industry was given very much attention by the Government of Kerala. A few of the novel ideas introduced in the recent times include the sea plane, underground aquarium etc., along with promoting the indigenous products like ayurveda and backwater tourism. The Government have envisaged achieving a yearly growth rate of 15 percent on foreign tourist arrivals and 7 percent on domestic tourist arrivals through aggressive marketing programme. This will yield 30 lakhs foreign tourists and 180 lakhs domestic tourists by 2021 according to a conservative estimate. Moreover, the Government is formulating a plethora of new strategies to strengthen the existing international markets like USA, UK, Australia, France and Germany together with the untapped markets like Russia, South Africa, the Middle East etc. Thus, the tourism industry in Kerala, by means of various marketing techniques, sophisticated advertisement methods, diversified products, the targets are well in the reach by 2021. The demand and supply gap of skilled tourism employees has been alarming and it is expected to increase further due to the exponential industrial growth. Human Resource

demand in the tourism industry is over 2 lakhs whereas the supply is only to the tune of a mere 12000 or even less. In order to minimize the said gap between demand and supply, conscious steps have already been taken by the Government of Kerala.

Sustenance of an organisation is dependent on appropriate competencies of the managers in the organisation. Competency-based approaches depend mainly on identifying a range of specific skill sets and knowledge level which encompass all aspects of the managers at work. This indicates that there is a need for the competencies with more professional knowledge coupled with flair for general managerial qualities in order to meet fast changing development needs of hospitality managers. The competency mapping is a process of identifying key competencies of the employees in an organisation. Also, it makes out the jobs and functions within the organisational set up. Every industry in the present scenario is striving to maximize its efficiency so as to sustain in this highly competitive business environment. Tourism industry is not an exception; rather, it has been affected more due to its diverse nature. Managers in the tourism industry were being challenged constantly due to the demand as in the saying, think globally and act locally. Volatile political situations, global economics upheaval, fluctuating exchange rates, cultural differences, innovative and diversified product etc. are entering into the critical business decisions of tourism managers. Tourism professional managers hold 29 percent of the employment in tourism sector and also playing a vital role in the development and productivity of this sector (Wilson *et al.*, 2006). Competency-based job description will not only ease the employers' recruitment process but at the same time the employees will be focusing on developing and maintaining requisite skills for their positions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Substantial amount of literature about competencies and managerial effectiveness have been documented by various authors from time to time. Kanungo and Mishra (1992) in their studies indicate that traditional management approach is insufficient to adapt responses to both the job tasks and technological and socio-economic changes. The frame work provided by competency approach would serve as a useful guide for systematic training plans (Serpell and Ferrada 2007). Collins and Porras (1996) observe that the organisations following human resource system supported by the required competencies are referred as the visionary or high performance organisations. Training programmes that are following a traditional approach have proven to be inadequate in meeting the needs of present business (Pepitone, 1995). Vance *et al.* (2011) observe that organisations recognize global competence among the managers. This will result into increased capability in cross-

cultural sensitivity, relationship building capability, greater creativity and more effective problem solving. According to Gamble and Messenger (1990), due to the diverse nature of hospitality industry the defining of skills and competencies' requirement is not an easy task. According to Rothwell and Wellins (2004) competency model can be used for professional development of employees that meet the needs of employers and also it can help the educational institute to develop academic curriculum. Partlow and Gregorie (1994) argue that due to continuous management needs and complexities of tourism industry the executives should develop their knowledge skills. Shermon (2008) feels that competency mapping identifies an employee's ability and weakness and thereby helping the employee to rededicate himself/herself to improve upon to perform in accordance with organisational requirement. Lucia and Lepsinger (1999) suggest all human resources practices in an organisation should be integrated and inclusive with the competencies for optimum operational effectiveness.

Competency model identifies ability of an individual in terms of knowledge, skill and behaviour required for performing the organisational duties effectively (Chung Herrera *et al.*, 2003). According to Jauhari (2006) competencies are a combination of observable and applied knowledge, skill and behaviour which result to the competitive advantage for organisations. A competency model is a frame work which specifies the competencies required for effective execution of specific job and also helps the people in the organisation or professionals to assimilate, discuss and apply the same for optimum performance (Marrelli, Tondora, and Hoge, 2005). Fogg (1999) postulates the competency model as a descriptive tool that defines the competencies needed for performing a specific role of occupation entrusted by an organisation or industry. Shippman *et al.* (2000) state that the competency model depicts 7-9 competencies which will be required for accomplishment of specific task and may vary depends on organisations and work environment. Dalamare and Winterton (2005) recommend competency models can be used for the integration of education and training, aligning both with industry needs and appropriated as a guiding tool for promotions and transfer especially in dynamic environment like tourism. McClelland (1998) states that selections and assessment tools supported by competency models will ensure the right man at right job and healthy succession for specific posts.

Boyatziz (1982) in his study described competences as the underlying characteristics of an individual which can be related to effective or superior performance of the job and concluded that there are a range of factors which differentiate the superior from average performers. Two interrelated managerial competencies (technical and generic) have been distinguished in the literature (Martin and Stain, 1994; De Ansorena, 1996; Levy-Leboyer, 1997) i.e. Technical competencies which explain specific topics of tourism

business and Generic competencies which explains capability of self-regulation and self-control in job development. Cizel *et al.* (2006) postulate that even though major competencies are common to all managers, few are unique to occupational cases. Hersey and Blanchard (1988) and Van Dyke and Strick (1990) in their studies observed that technical, human, people skills, leadership skills with conceptual and demonstration of organisational skills are important competencies. Baum (1990) believes that managing guest with sensitivity, maintaining professional and ethical standard, professional appearances, effective communication and positive relationship with customers/ employees are main competencies of hospitality managers. According to Lucia and Lipsinger (1999) competencies are the ability of an individual on application of knowledge, skills, abilities, personal characteristics and behaviours of successful performance of work task of specific function. Personal characteristics are the attributes like intellectual/mental/cognitive, attitudinal/social/emotional and psychomotor/physical abilities which necessitate performing the required job.

According to Azeem and Fatima (2007), managerial effectiveness can be considered as the yardstick for measuring efficiency of an organisation. Campbell *et al.* (1970) define that managerial effectiveness is more on behavioural aspects and any set of managerial action should be optimal for identifying, accepting and exploiting both internal and external resources towards sustaining in the long run. Hellriegel *et al.* (2008) state that managerial effectiveness is based on the performance management.

Statement of the problem

The tourist operators are aiming a growth of 7-10 percent. The market conditions are frequently changing due to technological advancement, global economical instability, large scale natural disasters and high attrition rates. The study is to analyze managerial competencies required for the tourism managers to catch up with the turbulent environment and manage the organisations effectively.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To evaluate the effectiveness of competency model being practiced by tourism operators.
- To propose a competency model for tourism operators to enable them to effectively accomplish each roles

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study was to find out the required competencies of tourism professional managers who are operating in the state of Kerala. The researchers have also undertaken a comparative study with existing competency

models being practiced by tourism operators. The present study was carried out in the two high potential tourist places of Kerala, i.e. Ernakulam and Trivandrum. The tourism operators and tourism educational institutes have a higher density in this area. The survey was conducted from the period Nov 2012 to Dec 2012. The data collection instrument was questionnaire method and consisted of constructs relating to technical competencies, generic competencies, managerial effectiveness and demographic profile. Technical competencies (16 items) and Generic competencies (22 items) were adopted from Agut and Grau (2002), and Managerial effectiveness (10 items) were extracted from Cambell *et al.* (1970), Drucker *et al.* (1967) and Heir *et al.* (2008) (Annexure 3). The respondents were told to score the above items in 5 point likert scale. Pilot test was conducted to fine tune the structured questionnaire.

The criterion for selecting respondents was based on the qualifications and years of association with tourism industry. The population under consideration for this study was tourism operators, tourism promoters, faculties of hospitality educational institute, researchers and tourists. Respondents were chosen from reputed tourism operators like Thomas cook, SITA, Kerala Travels, Akbar Travels etc. Tourism promoters like Kerala Tourism Development Corporation, District Tourism promotion Officials and Educational institutes like Kerala State Tourism Department, Kerala Institute of Travel and Tourism Trivandrum, Indian Institute of Management Science, Kochi and Munnar Catering College were also included. The questionnaire was distributed to 150 individuals but only 100 valid questionnaires were received and utilized for analysis. Sample size was calculated by taking into account the mean and standard deviation of the key variables.

The research team member have met each respondent with the structured questionnaire for a focus interview and clarified all queries about the items in the questionnaire which intended to scale the competencies of tourism professional managers and managerial effectiveness. Few respondents were not sure about the item scaling and hence were left unattended, leading to invalidation of questionnaire. The comments on existing competency model and recommendations for effective managerial competencies were also obtained

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

The collected data were utilized for analysis by using various statistical tools. Reliability, and sample adequacy tests were conducted for checking the internal consistencies of data. Factor analysis was carried out to summarize the information contained in a large number of variables into a more precise and comparatively lesser number of relevant factors. To evaluate the sort of relationship between the independent variables (technical competencies and generic

competencies) and dependent variables (managerial effectiveness) correlation test was attempted. Regression analysis also were resorted to measure the linear association between the variables

Reliability and suitability of data

The reliability test was carried out and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the independent variable was found to be 0.874 and for the dependent variable as 0.702. Both were found to be in the satisfactory range.

Competency Factors - An Assessment using Factor Analysis

The Kaiser – Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity were tested and found that the KMO coefficient is 0.684 which is well above 0.50 indicating that patterns of correlations are relatively compact and so factor analysis should yield distinct factors ($p < 0.05$). Hence it can be concluded that the reduction of dimension can be effective.

Factor analysis was attempted to identify underlying variables, or factors, that explains the pattern of correlations within a set of observed variables. Factor analysis is also used for data reduction/structure detection and identifies a small number of factors that explain most of the variance that is observed in a much larger number of manifest variables. The purpose of data reduction is to remove redundant variables from the data file, perhaps replacing the entire data file with a smaller number of uncorrelated variables. Present study has been carried out with principal component analysis and maximum variance orthogonal rotation method. The loading of the original variable with factors were analysed. Principal component factor with Eigen value of 1 or greater were rotated by Varimax method (Annexure-1). Variables with loading above 0.690 were included in a given factor (Annexure-2). When the factors are orthogonal, the loadings can be taken as the correlation of the variables with extracted factors.

A total of 23 attributes have been subjected to the factor analysis. Eight factors were evolved from the analysis and it is seen that 73.23 percent of the total variance was explained by these factors. The first factor (Strategic actions) explained 20.38 percent of variance encompassing three items, the second factor (Administrative ability) explained 13.16 percent of variance encompassing three items, the third factor (Employee management) explained 8.88 percentage of variance encompassing three items and the fourth factor (Pro-activeness) explained 8.01 percent of variance that includes two items. The remaining factors have explained above 5 percent of the total variance.

The result of the factor analysis is summarised in Table 1. It is observed that the technical competency needs of tourism managers are made up of three major factors and generic competency needs are made up of five such factors. For the reason of parsimony the remaining items have been removed from the analysis.

The items evolved in the dimension reduction (rotated component matrix) were named technically/ logically and found that Operation and safety management, Employee management, and Services Management come under the grouping of technical competencies. Similarly, the factors like Pro-activeness, Self-management, Administrative ability, Strategic action and Persistence are grouped under the generic competency needs for tourism management.

Correlation Analysis of Variables

Bivariate correlation analysis is carried out to assess the relationship of independent variables (managerial effectiveness) and dependent variables (technical competencies and generic competencies) and the results are as follows.

From Table 2, it is understood that the correlation coefficient of independent variables i.e. technical competencies and generic competencies with managerial effectiveness are 0.514 and 0.366 respectively at 1% significant level. This indicates that there is a positive correlation that exists between the managerial effectiveness and technical /generic competencies.

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was used to identify the relationship between independent variables and dependent variable. A model of the relationship was hypothesized, and estimated parameter values were used to develop an estimated regression equation. The estimated regression equation confirmed to predict the value of the dependent variable from the given values of the independent variables.

Relationship model

The R value is 0.581, which represents that there is a fairly good correlation between independent variable (Managerial effectiveness) and dependent variables (Technical competencies and Generic competencies). Similarly, nearly 34 percent of the variance is explained ($R^2 = 0.337$) in the regression model.

Parametric Estimates

Table 3 allow us to specify multiple models in a single regression model. The first variable constant represents the

constant associated with strength of affiliation (13.011) which is positive indicating a positive relationship. The coefficient of Technical competencies (TC) is 0.753 and Generic competencies (GC) coefficient is 0.357.

From the above it can be summarized that

Managerial effectiveness = $13.011 + 0.753*(TC) + 0.357*(GC)$.

FINDINGS

Most of the tourism operators have not adopted any specific competency model for HR functions like appointments, promotions, transfers or training. Those operators who are using the competency model are seemingly either obsolete or vague. The appointments are based on just qualification or domain experience. The existing model (as in Annexure 3) mainly looks for experience in the tourism industry and a few managerial qualities. Large number of industry incumbents feel that the existing model does not have some key competencies required for managers and do not meet the current tourism environment. The tourism operators also have stressed the need for an effective competency model for the induction of tourism managers to take the industry to the newer heights in the years to come.

Managerial effectiveness is positively influenced by technical competencies. The technical competency of a manager in the tourism industry encompasses three factors, viz. safety, employee management and service management. Likewise, generic competency encompasses five factors that demonstrate general qualities like pro-activeness, self-management, administrative quality, strategic actions and persistence. In short, it can be concluded that the right blend of technical as well as the generic competency needs of personnel have to be taken into the active consideration of the tourism operators while devising the HR and administrative strategies particularly considering the larger interests of the industry in the tourism centric states like Kerala which have to address tremendous challenges in the globalised economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- * Tourism institutes need to emphasize on imparting training in general managerial qualities to reinforce the generic qualities in the academic curriculum.
- * A feedback on performance of tourism professionals and the effective execution plans of tourism jobs to be forwarded to tourism institute by the tourism operators.
- * Tourism operators and developers should evaluate the tourism environment periodically and forward the reports to the institutes and to the tourism professionals.
- * Periodic/refresher training or workshops on latest trends in tourism may be conducted by tourism institutes and the tourism departments.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The current study has been undertaken only on two developed tourism destinations of Kerala. As such, this cannot be considered as wholly conclusive. The results have been obtained from a few respondents only and so the sample size is not much large and diverse. The study would have been conducted in all the possible segments of the tourism industry and from where all categories of respondents would have been surveyed for obtaining an all inclusive data. Competency frame work may discourage or restrict the individuals to the particular profession only. The paper highlights the possibility for other service sectors to generate new ideas and concepts to develop HRM strategies and framework.

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Annexure 1

Total Variance Explained									
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.688	20.382	20.382	4.688	20.382	20.382	2.548	11.079	11.079
2	3.029	13.168	33.550	3.029	13.168	33.550	2.535	11.021	22.100
3	2.043	8.882	42.432	2.043	8.882	42.432	2.250	9.784	31.884
4	1.843	8.015	50.447	1.843	8.015	50.447	2.071	9.002	40.886
5	1.457	6.335	56.781	1.457	6.335	56.781	2.041	8.874	49.760
6	1.334	5.802	62.583	1.334	5.802	62.583	1.894	8.236	57.996
7	1.294	5.626	68.208	1.294	5.626	68.208	1.877	8.160	66.156
8	1.164	5.060	73.268	1.164	5.060	73.268	1.636	7.112	73.268
9	.877	3.811	77.080						
10	.801	3.481	80.560						
11	.663	2.881	83.441						
12	.545	2.371	85.812						
13	.489	2.125	87.938						
14	.483	2.100	90.038						
15	.421	1.831	91.869						
16	.414	1.799	93.668						
17	.317	1.379	95.047						
18	.279	1.213	96.260						
19	.262	1.140	97.400						
20	.207	.898	98.298						
21	.158	.686	98.984						
22	.140	.610	99.593						
23	.094	.407	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Annexure 2

SI No	Rotated Component Matrix ^a								
	Components	Component							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Quality management					.837			
2	Health and risk prevention at work					.781			
3	Work organisation			.816					
4	People and work team management			.842					
5	Human resources management			.727					
6	Knowledge about tourism products and services								

(Contd.)

7	Commercial management								.873
8	Accommodation management								.738
9	Ability to go beyond the barriers or limitations that come up in the job				.710				
10	Ability to argue own opinions in the decision making process				.793				
11	Impartiality towards problems							.769	
12	Control of hasty reactions in highly emotive situations (e.g. aggressiveness, resignation,								
13	Ability to adapt behaviour and way of thinking to new situations								
14	Stress tolerance: being able to maintain efficiency under time pressure situations							.712	
15	Responsibility for decisions and behaviours		.873						
16	Ability to maintain and create a high level of activity		.919						
17	Efficiency and flexibility to solve problems detected		.768						
18	Enterprising spirit: active search for new	.785							
19	Initiative to implement new plans	.811							
20	Positive vision towards things	.788							
21	Control of aims achievement within time limits						.752		
22	Attitude to meeting targets						.830		
23	User profile and behaviour								
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation.									
a. Rotation converged in 10 iterations.									

Table 1: Factor analysis result

TECHNICAL COMPETENCIES		Factor loading
Operation and safety management	Quality management	.837
	Health and risk prevention at work	.781
Employee management	Work organisation	.816
	People and work team management	.842
	Human resources management	.727
Service Management	Commercial management	.873
	Accommodation management	.738
GENERIC COMPETENCIES		
Pro-activeness	Go beyond the barriers	.710
	Ability to argue own opinion	.793
Self management	Impartiality	.769
	Stress tolerance	.712
Administrative ability	Responsibility	.873
	Agility	.919
	Efficiency and flexibility	.768
Strategic action	Enterprising spirit	.785
	Initiative	.811
	Positive vision	.788
Persistence	Timeliness	.752
	Target orientation	.830

Table 2: Correlations

		Technical Competencies	General Competencies	Managerial Effectiveness
Technical Competencies	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	100		
Generic Competencies	Pearson Correlation	.198*	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.048		
	N	100	100	
Managerial Effectiveness	Pearson Correlation	.514**	.366**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	100	100	100
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				

Table 3: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	13.011	6.155		2.114	.037
	Technical competencies	.753	.138	.460	5.448	.000
	Generic Competencies	.357	.109	.275	3.262	.002
a. Dependent Variable: Managerial Effectiveness						