



Human resource development in tourism: developing a training strategy for increasing employability

Anu Singh Lather, Shalini Garg & Sona Vikas

Abstract

Tourism is a growth industry and a major creator of value added, the industry is vulnerable to a variety of economic, ecological, geopolitical and meteorological factors, which shape the nature of its labour force. The fact that it is difficult to maintain high permanent staffing levels has led to a generic tendency to operate on the basis of a limited core staff and to employ the labour needed for day-to-day operations under atypical contractual arrangements, because of which the economic rents from continuous learning and experience of the staff are lost to a great extent. Added to this are other constraints like long, anti-social working hours, low pay, low job status, etc, which collectively make employment within the industry appear unattractive to many. This paper briefly outlines the human resources problems faced by the tourism industry in India and against this background the authors propose a tourism training strategy model for enhancing employability in India. There is a pressing need to develop a common minimum standard to upgrade skills to acceptable level and facilitate cross national tourism. Capacity building to increase awareness, value and skills for the creation, development and implementation of sustainable tourism projects assume a much greater importance today.

Key words: *Tourism Training, Employability, Strategy*

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Introduction

The travel and tourism industry in India is becoming more and more competitive (Chand & Chauhan, 2003). The industry is challenged by a growing demand for customer orientation, increasing international competition, volatile markets in an insecure environment, changing customer demands towards individualization and significant potential in various market segments. The amateur stage of the travel business is long over. Over the last two decades, the travel companies have transformed their pattern and structure to meet tough challenges in the international tourism market. So, in this volatile business environment, only that travel and tourism organization will succeed that will change to meet the competitive threats and opportunities to match the needs of a new travel market, and will bring flexibility, creativity, innovation, determination and professionalism into its operations. However, there are several human resource problems that plague the tourism sector, including low wages, high demand for staff flexibility, high staff turnover, and skill shortages. There is even a mismatch of tourism education with industry requirements, as a result of which qualifications from the tourism sector are much appreciated by other fields whereas qualifications from other sectors are found useful for tourism. Many qualified employees leave the sector and many trained tourism school graduates do not enter the sector, leading to a sheer waste of resources and skills. Forecasting of skills that will be needed in future, under conditions of sector volatility and vulnerability is a challenge. Multi-skilling, newly emerging areas in tourism like special interest tourism (for example eco-tourism, rural tourism, indigenous tourism, cultural heritage tourism, religious tourism, medical tourism and adventure tourism), recreational tourism (at lakes, mountains and spas) and business tourism are increasing the demand for flexibility in existing skill-sets of manpower (Ashraf & Mathur, 2003).

Additionally, in the tourism sector there is a universal, and sometimes overlapping, demand for knowledge and competencies. These include tourism-related knowledge and competencies (for example, knowledge of tourism products, tourism services, destinations and tourist attractions, comprehension of geography and climate, reservation and ticketing expertise, reservation systems, fare calculations, itinerary planning, time differentials, conferences and conventions planning, visa and travel insurance, foreign exchange services, MIS reporting for corporate account management, etc.) as well as business-knowledge competencies (for example, customer orientation, selling techniques, marketing and negotiation skills, decision-making and problem-solving, etc). Advanced knowledge and competencies may include foreign languages, product design and development. Sustainability-oriented tourism development requires a number of HRD strategies aimed at the tourism industry personnel, host community and the tourists, and underpinned by concepts and practices of sustainability. Sustainability based work culture, professional ethics and operational practices are basic to sustainability in tourism. Indian tourism, despite its immense potential, has seen tardy development, and shortcomings in the HRD domain have contributed to this below par performance (Page *et al*, 2001).

Within the published studies of HRM in tourism, two consistent problems that feature in the reports include skill shortage at the senior and technical levels and poor manpower planning (Baum, 1993). In a study of human resource management problems in the Thai tourism industry, it was found that there was a shortage of trained personnel, especially at the managerial level and there was no single agency responsible for human resource development in the tourism industry (Esichaikul and Baum, 1998). Among human resource management problems in the Latin American tourism industry were a lack of effective managerial training, lack of co-ordination between the education sector and the tourism industry, inadequate investment in training by private sector, insufficient and inadequately designed in-house training programmes, lack of travel agency training programmes and poor regulation of training institutions (Pizam, 1999).

All these challenges can be overcome by efficient and skilled manpower. For medium-sized and large tourism enterprises, human resource issues and the factors affecting their performance are usually linked to the staff and workforce and therefore recognizing the role of on-going development of the staff resource to achieve strategic goals become essential. Re-investment in the human resource through on-going training and development of the employee skills and ability to create and add value to the organization are inherent qualities for which successful tourism enterprises are recognized throughout the world (Page *et al*, 2001). Training of the tourism professionals is extremely important (Ashraf & Mathur, 2003). Improving the skills and knowledge of the workforce can assist destination competitiveness and help to establish and maintain a viable industry. Besides bridging the gap between the process of employment and day-to-day working, training keeps the employees abreast of developments in the organization and fosters camaraderie. Due to this reason, the learning function is taking center stage in organizations. Increasingly, business leaders understand how important learning is to the success of their organizations. Finding, retaining, and managing the development of talent is one of the most widely discussed topics in the corporate world today (Sloman, 2001). A critical issue for sustainable socio-economic development in India is the ability to ensure that those who are already in employment continue to have the skills and qualifications that are required for the continuous changes in the workplace. Employees have the need not only for updating their technical skills but also for developing further a range of more generic skills, including planning, problem solving, communication, IT and management skills. Learning how to organize knowledge effectively and apply it appropriately is vital for technical workers' development. This requires adequate and effective policies to be designed, developed and implemented for continuing vocational education and training (Sloman, 2001).

Numerous institutions have sprung up purporting to offer courses at various levels in travel, tourism, catering, hotel and institutional management across the country. However, most of them lack basic training facilities and do not meet acceptable standards (Ashraf & Mathur, 2003). They spew out graduates whose knowledge is

questionable as there is no centralized examination or certification. Training curricula are often ill-adapted to market demand, and even less to modern, diversified skills and training methodologies; instructors may be few, ill-adapted and ill-motivated, lacking technical knowledge and expertise in trainee counseling, and in orienting training to self-employment or market demand. It is therefore not surprising, that questions have often been raised about the level, scope and quality of tourism training and education in the country. Thus there is a need to come up with a uniform curriculum that is not only acceptable to the industry, but which is also competitive both locally and internationally. The situation today is that just as the industry itself still does not have a clear and adequate operational framework, the training is largely carried out in a haphazard and uncoordinated manner. There are even concerns about the sub-optimal state of tourism education and training and the associated skills shortages (Goel, 2003). Many of the students who graduate from tourism colleges are ill-equipped to comprehend the dynamics of globalization and its subsequent effects on the industry.

Enhancing skills to increase employability

The need for skills, knowledge and vision is being felt more and more today. With new offers and services emerging in tourism, the need for adequately qualified staff becomes even more critical. Thus, training and development plays an important role in developing professionalism in the business of tourism and travel agency operations. In fact, it is only exceptional learning and performance that will create a world that works better. Only those employees who keep themselves equipped with pertinent knowledge and competence in the workplace learning and performance field will excel. And, those who focus their efforts on developing human potential will survive in the long run. In other words, the need of the hour is employability skill-set (Pattanayak, 1998).

An educated and trained workforce is essential if India wants to develop and maintain a viable economy. From an individual perspective, preparation is the key to employability. Sound decisions regarding initial education and training are important, but people actually need to continue learning throughout their lifetime. Education and

training are very important for individual progress and for the future of society (Sharma, 2006). One of the unwavering messages of the Bible is that Christians are to be diligent, skilled, and faithful in developing their talents. Education and training are two primary ways acquiring talents and achieve excellence in our work and, thus, set good examples for others. For many adults, however, further education and training may not seem like an available option.

Even if formal education programmes are not obtainable, expanding their knowledge regularly should be the goal for those who want to develop and use their talents in the workplace. Many career strategy experts agree that unless people continue to develop their skills, they are likely to find themselves left out in the workplace. The employability of the potential workforce remains a concern and there could be shortage in sectors like tourism and retail in future. Workforce shortage fuels attrition rates and unprecedented salary increase, thereby forcing companies to resort to unethical practices of poaching manpower. This could erode India's competitiveness in the global market.

The Indian Government needs to take strong, positive action to focus on training, job creation and responsible development in collaboration with the private sector. Training programmes that are responsive to community needs and the needs of India's diverse workforce need to be designed and implemented diligently. For the first time job-seekers, or for those looking at the possibility of doing something different, all of these changes mean opportunity- the opportunity to acquire, update or transfer skills which can open the door to employment. To benefit from or respond to the changing job market, people have to be trained to ensure that their skills are in line with the opportunities of the job market, both now and in the future (Ashraf & Mathur, 2003).

The concept of employability has of late gained ground in the corporate world in the wake of economic reforms, and the emerging tendency towards public-private partnership. Business enterprises have been trying to develop competitiveness in the globalized environment by focusing on labour flexibility through multi-skilling, high performance work systems, increased productivity, adaptability and innovation of new products and services. (Sharma, 2006) Two interrelated key aspects determine

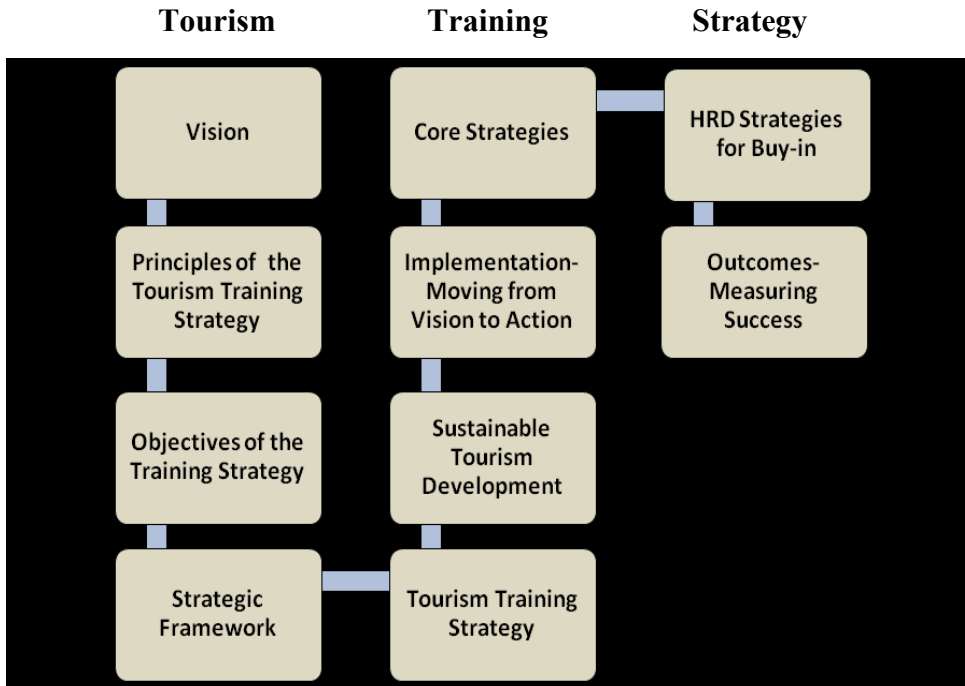
employability in the long run -- training measures and competence development. Competence and on-the-job skill development can be measured by a number of indicators. Key indicators, besides investment by companies in additional training, relate to the job content, and these are the ability to learn by being allocated to challenging work or being allocated to work that matches personal abilities. Training can be aimed at fulfilling short-term company needs or at general skills and competence development. In the perspective of future employability, the key challenge is how to equip people better for change both in current and future jobs. Employability is a broad concept and means adaptable and updated competencies and labour market-oriented behaviour for every person in the workforce. Mostly, the employability policies combine training, further training, re-training, career advice, placement and incentives or subsidizing programmes. In general, employability entails key aspects of access to (permanent) employment, advancement within employment and sustainable employment.

For the vulnerable group of non-permanent workers, key factors for employability include the impact on career development, in terms of transition into a permanent employment, occupational mobility and employment security. To open up opportunities for transition into permanent employment, targeted training and competence development are necessary.

Training strategy for tourism

Against this background, the authors propose to develop a training strategy for sustainable employability in tourism in India. A model for tourism training strategy drawn by the authors is illustrated in Figure 1 below, and it encompasses the critical steps that make up a strategic plan.

Figure1:



Vision

To ensure that every person already employed in the tourism sector, or seeking employment in tourism, has the opportunity to participate fully in training and development which enhance their life-skills and employability. The training strategy will be all-inclusive and foster equity, fairness and diversity in order to help people to take advantage of and benefit from economic and social development in the sector as it occurs.

Principles of the Tourism Training Strategy

Respect the needs of the people - To be committed to a training strategy that respects the needs of all, is open and accessible to everyone, regardless of culture, gender, ability, financial means or location

Preparedness - To provide avenues of opportunity to access training and development initiatives that will help to prepare them to take advantage of and contribute to economic and social development in tourism as it occurs

Collaboration - Building partnerships with the diverse sectors (such as hotels, travel agencies, airlines, attractions, restaurants, shops, resorts, convention centres and so on) to strengthen and expand the resources available for training and development initiatives. This principle will build on the government's commitment to continue to expand its relationships with academic institutions, private sector industry, labour and non-profit organizations, and to closely work on centre-state relationships.

Sustainable development - India is rich in resources and planning for the use of these resources for the long-term benefit of people is therefore of paramount importance. The training strategy will help in ensuring that development in the country is sustainable.

Objectives of the training strategy

Some of the objectives of training strategy include-

- Create a cooperative environment for tourism education and training
- Develop and upgrade human resource skills in tourism sector with emphasis on sustainable tourism development
- Develop strategies for buy-in by stakeholders and local communities
- Review and integrate existing models for training and skills dissemination

Strategic framework

Training interventions would operate within a larger framework-

- Cooperative and collaborative approach whilst retaining and recognizing national, regional and local characteristics and requirements
- Develop common minimum standards to upgrade skills to acceptable level and

facilitate International tourism

- Utilize collective knowledge resources and expertise of international agencies, national, regional, local tourism practitioners and administrators
- Information & Communication Technology (ICT) to be a prime mover and essential

element for networking and enhancing knowledge base

- Buy-in and involvement of stakeholders, communities, public and private sectors, especially Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)
- Capacity building to increase awareness, value and skills for creation, development and implementation of sustainable tourism projects
- Identify and designate centres of excellence.

Core strategies

To realize its vision for training in tourism, the Government needs to initiate core strategies, which include:

Having a training policy - To maintain industry training policy and standards framework, approve programmes and standards recommended by industry, register, track and certify trainees (through an industry training centre), and fund the industry training (based upon industry developed plans and priorities).

Identifying current and future skills and training needs - By developing an industry training strategy, designing and developing training programmes, establishing occupational and programme standards, promoting industry training and recruiting trainees, promoting careers in tourism, marketing and promotion of programmes to employers, promoting industry participation and engagement in training opportunities.

Adapting to the changing workplace – Providing opportunities for people from a varied backgrounds with a broad range of skills.

Establishing training trust funds - Community-based and community-driven, these trusts are designed to put decisions about training in the hands of the community itself.

Focusing on the youth – By creating opportunities for youth to develop knowledge and skills for work, increasing work opportunities for young people, helping young people respond to the changing nature of work by adopting a multi-disciplinary process with regard to career development opportunities, and removing cultural and social barriers that prevent young people from working.

Implementation - moving from vision to action

Following must be considered while implementing a tourism training strategy

- Include training for local communities - To explain the role of parks and protected areas in sustaining ecosystems, to create an awareness of the economic opportunities and benefits of tourism, to identify and teach customer service standards, to adhere to sustainable tourism practices, to achieve consistent quality in guiding, accommodation, and customer service and to establish a basic community level knowledge of tourism marketing.
- Dovetail training programmes and methodologies to create sustainable tourism products and services.
- Adopt appropriate model for cooperation amongst various stakeholders.
- Identify in consultation with NGOs, UN Organizations at least one pilot project in each state.
- Establish occupational skills capacity building activities for tour operations, guiding, accommodations management, cuisine preparation and transportation.
- To improve professionalism and innovation, establish an executive board for a Tourism Training Forum, encourage tourism MSMEs to develop their own training strategies linked to investment in people, and propagation of Best Practices.

Sustainable tourism development

The approach that needs to be followed here is to develop HR with dual aim of livelihood creation and preparing to meet pressures of increased tourism; defining, understanding and building commitment; networking all decision makers simultaneously at local and national level; consensus building and acceptance.

Tourism Training Strategy

Training programmes need to articulate well with employment-creation, for maximum synergy. Training should be strictly need-based and demand-led. Thus, linkages are essential with the various labour market institutions and processes: labour market information, employment services, public works, credit and other support to small enterprises, unemployment and social support services, etc. Training should provide skills for activities that are potential engines of economic and employment growth. Training services for existing enterprises, to upgrade and reorient technical skills or develop management capacity can help stimulate labour absorption, avoid retrenchments and facilitate redeployment of retrenched workers. Training needs to be a means of social integration and social healing, including life skills on peace, reconciliation, alternatives to violence, crisis prevention and preparedness, etc. Training activities must be culturally appropriate. They must promote self-employment, micro-enterprise and cooperatives.

The three key common threads of the tourism training strategy are:

Employability – ensuring a tight link between training and employment opportunities, among key labour market institutions upstream and downstream of training and addressing trainees’ needs and aptitudes.

Sustainability – preparing long-term continuation of skill-building activities, through capacity building and commitment of trainers, training institutions, decision makers, as well as social partners, NGOs and other relevant national and international actors, and limiting costs.

Decent work promotion – integrating into training work, guidance on occupational safety and health, non-discrimination, ethical practices, especially to safeguard tourists who visit India.

The trainings are divided into three levels, as described below:

Level I: Training for Basic or Primary skills – To be conducted for staff who have direct contact with tourists (e.g., tour or trail guides, host coordinators, airline crew, immigration officials, hospitality executives) for upgrading the service delivery standards, quality and productivity to a minimum acceptable level.

Level II: Training for Middle or Tertiary skills – To be conducted for middle level staff with basic qualifications or experience in the tourism industry (e.g., front office staff, tour operators and travel agents) in the form of refresher courses, environmental and sustainable tourism development workshops, language training, train-the-trainer programme, etc.

Level III: Training for Advanced skills – This is for tourism administrators, senior decision makers and administrators for project conceptualization, design, execution and management, property management, effective communication and marketing skills, problem solving, key account retention, etc.

For the various tourism industry players, different tourism programmes need to be designed and conducted. It is important that everyone participates in the training programmes, not only to improve their skills, knowledge, attitudes and abilities.

Table 1: Proposed training for a few tourism industry players				
Guides	National and local agencies	Private and public sector tourism operators	T o u r i s m administrators	Trainers
Basic Etiquettes	Planning, Financial and Marketing Management	E d u c a t i o n , C o m m u n i t y education	Project conception, development and management	Education
Knowledge of tourists, sites and attractions	Environmental Regulatory Framework	Cultural Heritage	Environmental and Social Impact Assessments	R e s o u r c e Management
Foreign Languages	Pollution Control	Conflict resolution	Cultural Heritage management	Socio-economic impact evaluation
H i s t o r i c a l Perspective	Recycling / Energy Conservation	E x c h a n g e programmes	E c o n o m i c cost-benefit	Marketing

			analysis	
Cultural Heritage, Conservation and Preservation issues	H e r i t a g e Management and Conservation	E m p l o y m e n t opportunities	V i s i t o r management	Conservation
Local Arts and Crafts	O v e r a l l Maintenance	Local Community participation	Carrying capacity analysis	Cultural Heritage Management
H a n d l i n g emergency	E m p l o y m e n t Generation	Local Arts and Crafts revival		Fiscal Management
	P l a n n i n g , transportation, land planning , marketing and retail Development	Awareness of heritage values, H e r i t a g e conservation and c u l t u r a l preservation		
		Impact of economic and cultural tourism		
		Skills upgradation – emphasis on women and children		

HRD strategies for Buy-in

It is imperative for stakeholders and local community to buy-in for success of sustainable tourism. In this regard, awareness programmes based on heritage values need to be conducted, imparting education at primary and tertiary levels (to include cultural heritage content), development of relevant vocational skills, handicrafts and performing arts revival and sustenance programmes. Quality employment, apprenticeship, skills up gradation, certification and training, along with a long-term plan for career development is also required.

Outcomes – measuring Success

Along with a vision statement to guide the future of training in tourism, and laying down objectives, what is critical is the measuring the outcomes of the training strategy. These measures for success can ultimately serve as a yardstick for evaluating the strategy. These include:

- Increased diversity in the workforce
- Increased number of social assistance recipients re-entering the labour force
- Increase in employment
- Greater collaboration amongst government, business, industry and other key partners in the labour market
- Addressing community needs more effectively
- Contribute to the growth and economic success of the tourism industry in India
- Increase tourism industry's contribution to the state revenues
- Increase the industry's ability to attract and retain qualified workers
- Increased awareness of careers in tourism as a career of choice amongst young people, parents, educators, employers and the general public
- Partnerships to promote tourism industry training programmes and career paths
- Increased number of individuals entering and completing tourism education, training and occupational certification programmes
- New training programmes for the tourism industry keeping in mind the growth areas of the economy
- Improved bridging and laddering among tourism occupations and industry training programmes
- Increased employer engagement in tourism education, training, career development and recruitment

Involvement of people from the local community helps tourism business substantially as it avoids the cost of staff turnover, employers who work with a diverse mix of employees find that the investment in staff training and support far outweighs the cost of staff turnover, employing locals in turn results in more loyalty and support from the local community, networks for linking with other available staff are strengthened,

qualifications gained through continuous training and development of professional skills play an important role in access to permanent or non-permanent employment contracts, the lifelong learning and competence development approach aims at equipping the workforce with the required knowledge and skills, rapidly changing work processes necessitate both the capacity and opportunity to adapt to such processes.

Conclusion

Training and development, human performance improvement and , organizational development have earned a strategic seat at the mission-critical table of many businesses today. The training that is being imparted today is largely haphazard and uncoordinated. Companies are not providing training, particularly entry-level job training. They are expecting people to come to them with the skills they need (for entry-level jobs). As a result, there is the problem of skill gap problem, which the management has to grapple with. But tourism organizations need to solve their own skills gap problems. It behoves employers, in a tightly competitive environment, to reduce the training costs by making search and selection the mainstay of their human resource strategy. However, companies often forget that they still need to train. Management training is still required because people need to understand the leadership function of the company and the business it is in, and to develop people for holding future positions. Technical training is important because people need to keep up with the fast pace of technology. Skill training is also required because people have to keep up with changes in the process of work. Safety training is needed because it is regulated. Sales and marketing training is crucial because the payoff is very high and also because product knowledge is at the core of the business. There is a whole lot of company-specific knowledge that is difficult to buy.

The need of the hour is to impart a sustainable development competence to the future work-force in order to ensure preparedness for the future work-place. Training not only creates employment, but also boosts employability. It provides the technical,

entrepreneurship and work skills that are indispensable. It also offers people a longer-term perspective for themselves.

The commitment to excellence and continual improvement in tourism and hospitality industries of other countries should be a lesson to India. There are plenty of good quality tourism and hospitality training programmes being conducted, especially for those who seek to enter the industry. In India, there is a lot of talk about the importance of in-service training for the management and staff, but talks and actions hardly match. Countries like Fiji have approached tourism training as a national priority, encompassing all segments of the industry and the general public. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Indian tourism is not enjoying the growth that Tourism India has been hoping for. There is no doubt that India is an outstanding destination by any standard, but we are in an increasingly competitive global tourism environment and unless all segments of the tourism industry operate to world standards, travellers from major source markets will invariably compare India with other destinations and this may not necessarily be in India's favour.

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