

To Study the Training Program Implemented by the Housekeeping Department for Onboarding Staff in a Post Pandemic World and its Impact on Employee Motivation

Rasika Shahane*, Mayola Fernandes**

Abstract

In any industry, recruitment, training and effective onboarding of a new staff is considered to be a challenging task. In the backwash of the coronavirus pandemic, however, the industry is now found in completely new landscape. The old followed practices for recruiting and training are no longer effective enough. There is complete new set of requirements established by the COVID-19.

Post the outbreak of pandemic, hospitality industry has witnessed a drastic change. Sudden lockdown and prolonged closure of the hotels has made the employees of the industry suffer a lot. From a busy working day to a day without any work has been a very unpleasant transition for everyone. However, post unlock hotels have started their operations slowly following all the new normal implemented post COVID-19.

Imagine, a crisis to forces hospitality industry to change their way of operations almost overnight. Notwithstanding initial fears and anxiety, industry has realized that these changes in operations could be treated as a blueprint for upcoming years. This is what the industry leaders are finding across the globe as they respond to the COVID-19.

Housekeeping being a core department responsible for maintaining the upkeep of the hotel, is no longer responsible for just the cleaning jobs. The role has changed 360 degrees and the department has truly become a backbone of the hotels. In the difficult times of pandemic, staffs have reskilled and upskilled themselves to deal with this situation and create safe and hygienic environment for both staff and guest.

Lot of training programs have been implemented vigorously before the reopening of hotels, making their staff ready to take up the new challenges. These

training programs have helped the staff members keep their morals high and welcome guests with new energy and hope.

Keywords: Pandemic, COVID-19, Hospitality Industry, Housekeeping, Training, New Normal

INTRODUCTION

In any industry, recruitment, training and effective onboarding of a new staff is considered to be a challenging task. In the backwash of the coronavirus pandemic, however, the industry is now found in completely new landscape. The old followed practices for recruiting and training are no longer effective enough. There is complete new set of requirements established by the COVID-19.

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* Assistant Professor, AISSMS College of HMCT, Pune, Maharashtra, India. Email: rasika.shahane@gmail.com

** Assistant Professor, AISSMS College of HMCT, Pune, Maharashtra, India. Email: meyoladf@gmail.com

The pandemic has kept the industry on its toes to figure out the ways and means by which they can adapt the rapidly changing operation trends and conditions. It's all about how they manage to inculcate the new role and activities in their workers. These dynamics are all about the role of automation and reduced human interaction. More importance to hygiene and cleanliness and creating safe environment for the guest and staff.

Housekeeping being a core department for maintaining the upkeep of the hotel, is no longer responsible for just the cleaning jobs. The role has changed 360 degrees and the department has truly become a backbone of the hotels. In the difficult times of pandemic, staffs have reskilled and upskilled themselves to implement the new operation standards and create safe and hygienic environment for the guest.

The hotels have changed the operation standards for housekeeping department. From the floor full of staff, now its minimum staff managing operations. Room inventory has been reduced by allotting alternate guestrooms maintaining the social distancing norms. Evidence is provided in the form of a seal for the sanitized rooms. Staff works wearing PPE kits. Linen is treated more carefully, keeping in mind the cross-contamination possibilities. Technology has taken a place of a human being. Sensors have been installed to reduce the touch points. Timely sanitation is provided. All the staff are checked for temperature and oxygen levels, making sure they are fit to perform their duties. There are constant checkpoints provided for staff reminding them safety of themselves and the guests in the hotel.

To sustain these challenges, hotels have come up with strategy to develop housekeeping employee's critical, technological, perceptive proficiencies. Housekeeping staff also has to focus on their social, emotional skills and their acceptance and flexibility towards the new normal. This will help them deal effectively, efficiently and sensibly with their guests.

This also means that housekeeping department has increased their training budget and the commitment towards reskilling and upskilling the staff to strengthen the operations and to deal with future interruptions.

The Six steps training module (Insero & Craddock, 2015) has helped employees to reskill themselves for the new face of the housekeeping department. The first three steps help to design the strategy and the last three help the execution.

Step 1 is about identifying the skills required for the day-to-day operations.

This has helped housekeepers to identify the key drivers affecting their daily routine operations. Housekeepers have managed to identify the shift in activities, employee behaviour and skills that will enhance their operations post pandemic. For example, in normal situation if the departed room was cleaned immediately and was made ready for the next guest. Now the room is sealed and left vacant for a day and then the linen is treated, sanitized and washed. The room is cleaned next day and is made available for the new guest after 2 days. Staff is minimizing the guest interaction by providing printed instructions manuals to help the guest. Regular telephonic interaction is happening for making guest feel comfortable in the room. Safety instructions have been displayed for the guest and staff to be followed every day. This has helped the guest gain confidence about their safety and hygiene practices followed at the hotel.

Step 2 has helped housekeeping staff to upskill themselves making them ready for their new role. Housekeeping staff is considered as a critical workforce in hotel operations. Their adaptability and acceptance to new technology, digital operations, their social and emotional skills are the key drivers of the operations. Hence training them to adapt the technology and using it to their benefits is must. Technology like, temperature check machines, reflector meter, sanitation levels are going to be a vital part of their daily routine.

Step 3 has allowed housekeepers to identify and bridge the gap between the old and new skill sets required by the housekeeping staff. The operating model has accommodated the changing environment and has developed right skills in a just in time manner. For which the digital tools have complemented the learning through live video sessions demonstrating the new tools and techniques. One on one online sessions on empathy building, dealing with anxiety, uncertainty guest may feel while staying in hotel etc.

Step 4 is all about implementation of the new learnings of employees in their daily operations and training employees to multitask.

Hotels gave enough time and opportunity to the employees to implement newly acquired skills and techniques while dealing with minimal occupancy. This

gave them confidence about the effective implementation and prepared them better to deal with future disruptions.

Step 5 has allowed housekeeping department to test their capabilities to manage the operations with minimum staff. This step can be considered as a continuation of step 4 where the main focus was to train employees to multitask. Multitasking has helped to plan and execute the operations with minimum staff and maximum use of technology.

Step 6 has been the most important step as to accomplish the goal of making employees future ready and that is training budget. In spite of major revenue loss, they had to reserve enough budget to implement effective training programs. The result of this is housekeeping department is all set to implement the new normals in their operations and as strong training program and SOPs are ready to onboard new recruits.

LITERATURE REVIEW

P. Krishnakumar (April 2020) mentions in his article that pandemic has brought a drastic change in cleaning protocols. Housekeeping is at the forefront dealing with crucial unlock norms implemented by the government. During the outburst of COVID-19, hoteliers had sleepless nights because of two reasons. The first and a major one is loss of revenue and other one is what new and unknown is coming their way in future. The drastic operational changes were discussed in the virtual round table conference of housekeepers, understanding the challenges guest is going to through at them related to anything that causes doubt in their mind about their health and safety.

Shilpi Khanna (Director of rooms - Sahar hotels - April 2020) also mentioned about the initiatives taken by the hotels to live up to the upcoming challenges and make their housekeeping employees future ready. The main challenge in this process faced by them was to convince the staff for use of technology as technology was going to replace almost everything around them. Right from room entries to treating linen in a certain way to using sanitation equipments in every nook and corner of the room, wearing PPE kit while working, it was indeed a mammoth task for them. However staff understood the need of an hour really well and helped hotels inculcating these skills in them through the vigorous trainings.

Parvati Shetty (2020) stated in her article that, pandemic has brought lot of uncertainty in every business but

hospitality industry has got hampered big time. The challenges in front of them are huge and training their staff to keep their moral high is the ultimate solution to this situation. Many hotels have communicated with their employee time to time making them understand the changes that they might have to face in their operations once they resume hotels. Housekeeping was given more attention as their job responsibilities doubled due to this Pandemic.

Philip Bacon (2019) spoke in his article that, changes in the hotel operations are going to be permanent as the impact of pandemic is going to be long lasting. Housekeeping department has to pull up their socks and impart the advanced training in their employees for the use of special equipments, changed procedures of room cleaning and sanitation. This will help them understand the ways to implement these new changes effectively and efficiently. Not only that but these trainings will also boost the moral and reassure the employees about the job security in future.

Smita Rathod, Director of Housekeeping - Pullman (2020) said that the hotels were operational on the minimum staffing but the challenges were to deal with the anxiety of the associates and the guests. Staff was not familiar with the new normals as they were in the learning phase. Hotels have gone an extra mile to meet these training requirements and inculcate the new normal as a way of life. Cleaning protocols have changed, lot of use and throw stuff has been included in operations. Housekeeping uniform has changed. Sanitizers are found in every corner of the hotel. Guest floors are maintaining high standards of cleanliness. Staff is taking extra care about each touch point in the guest room. The all efforts are only to reassure staff as well as guests about their health and safety.

Vipul Kumar Gupta (Director Housekeeping J. W. Marriott, 2020) stated that because of the social distancing, certain design changes will have to be done in the guest rooms and public areas. Procedures like fumigation, sanitation, and other cleaning procedures to maintain an air quality will be increased. Waste management procedures will change. Hence it is essential for housekeeping staff to be well equipped and well acquainted with these changed procedures. This will not only make them confident but also will result into better handling of hotel operations.

Marril Guzman (January 2021) mentioned in the article that, housekeeping operations have changed 360 degrees. Gone are the days where manual or semiautomated cleaning procedures were implemented. Housekeeping is no longer behind in the use of technology. The staff has been trained for the use of software, and various equipments. The housekeeping is under spotlight with high guest expectations as for them the ultimate impact of cleaning is guest safety.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Table 1

<i>Training Programmes Implemented</i>				
<i>Particulars</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>
Use of UV lights and Lamps	52	62.7	31	37.3
Careful handling of Linen	74	89.2	9	10.8
Handling of PPE kits	83	100.0	0	0.0
Dealing with high touch points	47	56.6	36	43.4
Training through videos	12	14.5	71	85.5
Use of new equipment	72	86.7	11	13.3
Dealing with guest facing anxiety	38	45.8	45	54.2
Opt out services	47	56.6	36	43.4
Sanitation and disinfection Processes	83	100.0	0	0.0
Newer AI and technology related training	56	67.5	27	32.5
Participation in Certification programmes by hotel or govt.	18	21.7	65	78.3
Total	83	100	83	100

Table 2

<i>Impact of Training Programmes on Motivational Levels to Adopt New SOP's Post Pandemic</i>					
<i>Particulars</i>	<i>Highly Effective</i>	<i>Effective</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Somewhat Effective</i>	<i>Ineffective</i>
Impact of Training	20	15	18	20	10
Confidence level during onboarding	43	23	11	6	0
Level of motivation post training	31	42	5	3	2

Table 2 depicts that 20 respondents state that the Impact of Training is Highly Effective and Somewhat Effective respectively. With regards to confidence level during onboarding, 43 respondents have positively replied that confidence levels are High due to

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the various training programs implemented in housekeeping department of the hotel.
- To study the impact of training programs on the motivation levels of the housekeeping employees post pandemic.

DATA COLLECTION

The research was carried out by circulating a well-formed questionnaire (a google form) amongst the housekeeping employees of the 5 star hotels in the city of Pune. Total 98 responses were received out of which 83 were valid for the data analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The above data states that housekeeping employees agree that they have undergone training programmes specifically structured to impart training with regards to onboarding post the COVID-19 pandemic. With respect to 'Handling of PPE kits' and 'Sanitation and disinfection Processes', 100% of employees have agreed to being trained for the same. 'Training through videos, 'Participation in Certification programmes by hotel or govt.' have been reported as the 85.5% and 78.3% respectively, as training not received. 'Newer AI and technology related training' (67.5%), Careful handling of Linen (89.2%), Use of new equipment (86.7%) have been rated high with regards to training received by the respondents.

the training imparted. Motivation levels have been reported as High by 42 respondents. It is also remarkable to note that none of the employees considered 'Confidence level during onboarding' as ineffective.

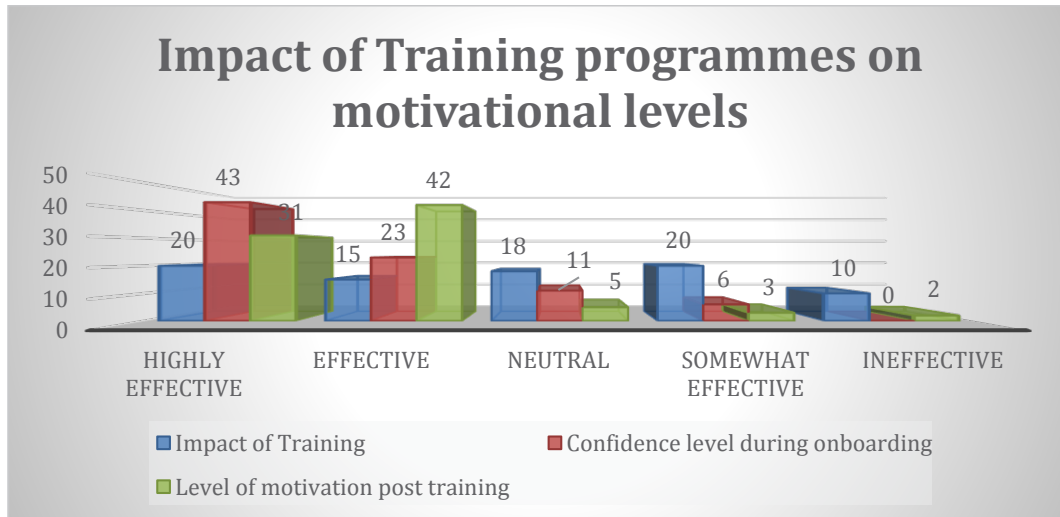


Fig. 1

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

- In The difficult times of pandemic, hotels understood the need of maintaining the high moral of the employees.
- Enough training was offered through online mode to housekeeping employees to keep them updated with their jobs.
- The need of an hour was understood and anticipated really well and staff was also trained for handling post pandemic operational changes in the housekeeping tasks.
- Hotels also made their employees aware about the latest technologies which they were expected to use after resuming their duties.
- Enough training of new AI and handling of linen was imparted in the staff members.
- The study also stated that the impact of training was highly effective and boosted the moral and self confidence of employees for handling the post pandemic operations in the hotels.

The research concluded that the time was hard for employees to undergo the process of lockdown. The sudden changes in daily routine, anxiety of job loss and not being able to cope with the new normal were the common issues which hotels addressed by imparting the necessary knowledge and training. This initiative by the hotels helped the housekeeping employees to be future ready.

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