Paper Title

Agile talent management in the Irish hospitality industry – closing the skills gap

Broad Research Area

HRM /Organisational Behaviour/ Organisational Studies

Purpose of the paper

Fáilte Ireland the Irish National Tourism Authority has stated that there is a chronic skills shortage across the Irish tourism and hospitality industry (Kelly, 2022). This is reflective of the issues facing the industry on a global scale. The industry is experiencing acute labour and skills shortages. The Irish hospitality industry, similar to the international hospitality industry, is endeavouring to overcome the impacts of sustained closures and business restrictions resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. This study investigates how an agile approach to talent management can be utilised by the industry to close this skills gap. There will be particular focus on workplace-based training and education initiatives derived from industry and academia collaboration, and the potential impact of this form of engagement on retention and career progression. Now more than ever, developing and retaining talented hospitality employees is of paramount importance.

Theoretical Background

Many of the challenges faced by the hospitality industry, such as high levels of labour turnover and problems recruiting employees, could be attributed to ineffective or outdated human resources management practices. Many hospitality organisations are reluctant to invest in training (Choi & Dickson, 2009; Jaworski, Ravichandran, Karpinski, & Singh, 2018), coupled with the fact that the industry has increasingly found it difficult to attract and retain suitable employees (Gupta, 2019; McGinley, Hanks, & Line, 2017; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2019). Employees are fundamental to the success of a hospitality organisation. The survival and success of an organisation is therefore highly dependent on the supply and retention of quality talented employees. If talent is identified and acknowledged as key to business success, managers should place it at the top of the agenda (Denning, 2018). 'Talent management' has been identified as contributing significantly to creating organisation competitive advantage (Gupta, 2019) and can help hospitality organisations attain their strategic goals (Nur Lyana & Wan Noordiana Wan, 2018). A study of hospitality educators found that the existing higher education landscape was facing many challenges, which would necessitate innovation in higher education in general and hospitality education specifically (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). Themes that emerged from this study were the creation of new partnerships and new modes of delivery. Undoubtedly, there is a need for improved collaboration between industry and academia.

Methodology

The research methodology for this study has been designed to effectively address the research question and related objectives. A sequential multi-phase research approach has been adopted as it fits with the research question and the pragmatic research paradigm. The rationale for using this approach is that the research question will be addressed more effectively by employing qualitative research methods and collecting data in more than one phase.

The first phase of the primary data collection consisted of a series of semi-structured interviews with hospitality human resource managers in organisations that have been part of an industry-based education and training initiative. Hospitality employees who completed the programme were also interviewed, in addition to academic staff involved in developing and delivering this pilot programme. The interviews were one-to one and semi-structured. This design of interview allowed an understanding of the participants attitudes and opinions to be gained (Saunders, 2019).

Phase two will build on the findings from phase one. During the second phase, semi-structured interviews will be carried out with managers in the wider hospitality population to investigate their opinions and attitudes towards collaborating with academia to deliver industry-based training programmes. The methodological approach of thematic analysis, which was developed as a means of analysing qualitative research, will be employed to analyse the data collected from the interviews. This approach was deemed appropriate, as it is suitable for identifying and analysing themes that emerge from the data.

Main Findings

The preliminary findings from the first phase of this study have confirmed that hospitality managers, employees and academic staff, all strongly support workplace-based training and education initiatives derived from industry and academia collaboration. The many advantages of a tailored education and training programme were confirmed as a key tool to recruit and retain staff in the hospitality industry. It was also recognised that had this pilot programme not been available the participants who completed it, would not have had the opportunity to receive an academic qualification and may have left the industry to pursue a career elsewhere. Instead, many of the participants, since completing the programme have been promoted. Hospitality managers acknowledged the challenges they are experiencing with regard to the skills gaps in all areas of the industry; however, they have indicated that the positions they are finding most difficult to fill are at supervisory level.

Potential Contribution

From an analysis of the extant literature, it is evident that a gap exists between the needs of the hospitality industry and the hospitality curricula offered by education institutions. The review also shows that this gap is not a new phenomenon and has been found by researchers on a regular basis over the past 20 years. Amongst other issues, this research will continue to investigate why such differences persist between educators and industry and how can they be addressed in an efficient and effective manner.

This study will present an up-to-date critical analysis of literature in the area of talent management in the hospitality industry. The evolution of theories will be examined, highlighting gaps in the literature. A conceptual framework of strategic agile talent management for hospitality organisations will be presented. The study will evidence the benefits of agile talent management for an industry known for very traditional human resource practices.

This research will offer a robust practical solution to address the skills gap in the Irish hospitality industry. This will be achieved by adopting a holistic approach to the research, involving hospitality employees, managers and academics. A practical workplace-based training and education initiative involving collaboration between industry and academia will be presented, as a mechanism to support the hospitality industry in closing the skills gap. This programme will also be of benefit to educational institutions. It will provide them with a framework upon which to build relevant education and training programmes. It will allow the educators to fulfil their remit relating to the development and delivery of curricula that will enable their graduates to successfully contribute to their own careers and to the overall development of the industry.

Key words

Hospitality, skill-gap, industry training

References

Choi, Y., & Dickson, D. R. (2009). A Case Study into the Benefits of Management Training Programs: Impacts on Hotel Employee Turnover and Satisfaction Level. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism, 9*(1), 103-116. doi:10.1080/15332840903336499

Denning, S. (2018). The emergence of Agile people management. *Strategy & Leadership, 46*. doi:10.1108/SL-04-2018-0042

Gupta, V. (2019). Talent management dimensions and their relationship with retention of Generation-Y employees in the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 31*(10), 4150-4169. doi:10.1108/IJCHM-10-2018-0859

Jaworski, C., Ravichandran, S., Karpinski, A. C., & Singh, S. (2018). The effects of training satisfaction, employee benefits, and incentives on part-time employees' commitment. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 74*, 1-12. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2018.02.011

Kelly, P. (2022, 4 February 2022). Tourism recovery at risk as 40,000 jobs go unfilled. *Irish Independent*.

Lugosi, P., & Jameson, S. (2017). Challenges in hospitality management education: Perspectives from the United Kingdom. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management, 31*, 163-172. doi:10.1016/j.jhtm.2016.12.001

McGinley, S. P., Hanks, L., & Line, N. D. (2017). Constraints to attracting new hotel workers: A study on industrial recruitment. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 60*, 114-122. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2016.10.010

Nur Lyana, B., & Wan Noordiana Wan, H. (2018). Effects of Talent Management on Employee Retention: A Case Study of Hospitality Industry. *Global Business & Management Research, 10*(3), 697-707.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. . (2019). *Research Methods for Business Students* (8th ed.). New York: Pearson.

Sen, K., & Bhattacharya, A. (2019). Attracting and managing talent, how are the top three hotel companies in India doing it? *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes, 11*(4), 404-417. doi:10.1108/WHATT-04-2019-0021