

# Skills Required At the Front Office in Hospitality Sector

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In recent years, there is need to develop human resources in the hospitality sector especially within the services provided in the Hotels. The key aspects of the development of the hotel management are the quality of service, management skills and more specifically the working nature of the employees at the hotel front office. This paper demonstrates the analysis of the hotels in the Japan concerning with their skill set and training background of the employees working in the front office of the hotel. Major 4 stars and 5 star hotels in Japan were targeted to conduct the analysis. This analysis recognizes the training profile and skills of the group of staff members working at the front office in the hotels. It also measures attitudes to key skills requirement within the front office work.

**Keywords:**hotels, front office, Japan, skills, quality, tourism, hospitality sector, management.

## INTRODUCTION

The most significant resource for running a business successfully in the competitive market is people. This can be realized in the fields and services of hospitality sector. The people working in the various departments of the hospitality sectors should have been given proper training and they should have good quality of skills, especially in the hotel management system. There is need to develop three training programs for the hotel staffs especially for those who are working at the hotel front office to improve their quality of work and to provide the best services to the customers. The most important aspects which have to be considered at the front office work are - the role of reception, marketing and communication within the operating business. The growth of the hotel businesses is totally depend upon the Quality of service, Well-skilled employees and management strategies. The reputation of the hotel depend upon the working skills of the employees at the front office. Many researchers from various countries are looking for the development of human resource and skills in hotel front office [1].

There exists wide varieties of the property types when an individual talks about “the hotel”,

wherein one can observe many varieties of activities carried out in hotel front office which differs from hotel-to-hotel., depending upon the size of the property, location and the popularity in the market. Before entering into the hotel and availing the services, the customers had to first approach the front office staff. So, there exist a significant role of hotel front office in the hospitality sector [2]. Wherein the work at the hotel front office comprises of “meeting and greeting” guests, making payments, providing the significant information about their hotel stay. More often, this activities are carried at the reception desk[3].

Many researchers have evaluated the studies regarding the nature if work in the front office across various countries in the Europe. They have organized certain programs for improving the management system at the hotel front office by illustrating a framework consisting of the methods that will improve the skills of the employees working in the front office. The study of training programs in various hotels was also been carried out and it was found that the employees working there shows minimum interests in the training program and there was no appropriate investment made for

conducting training programs [4]. Some studies were focused on evaluating the responsibilities of the employees at the front office, the significant activities required were taken into consideration and the training programs were organized accordingly. The studies have concluded that, development of employee's skills have proved to be a significant factor in the business growth within the hospitality sector [5].

The working techniques in the front office of the hotels in Japan were taken into consideration for the study and analysis and it was observed that, there was a need to improve the communication skills and the employees should learn foreign languages, especially for the staffs of front office, so that they can communicate properly with the foreign customers [6]. The first priority should be given for the guest satisfaction, there should be proper interaction between the guests and the front office employees. The roles and responsibilities of the hotel manager is also considered in the evaluation. Many strategies were introduced to enhance the quality of work in the front office of the hotel[7].

This paper demonstrates about the study required to explore the profiles, work background, attitudes, educational attainment, strategies of the staffs at front office carried out in the competitive market of the luxurious hotels such as five star hotels. Essential work environment should be provided to the staff working in the front end office of the hotel irrespective of the geographical conditions [8]. Appropriate trainers who are experienced in their field of management should be introduced in the training programs which will be beneficial for the employees working at the front office. There exist an environment which is located in Northern Ireland, wherein many traditional education and training levels were organized by certain organizations [9]. But in some cases, it was found that retention, skills, reputation and recruitment in the hospitality sector affects the potential growth of the country. The survey was also conducted in the hotel of Northern Ireland, wherein the report stated that the level of work-relevant

qualifications were very less, certain training programs were also organized but they were only limited up to food hygiene, health and safety. There was need to reinforce the training programs for the business growth which can be done by including the additional training tasks in the important occupation such as chefs, employee skills at the front office, foreign languages and communication [1].

All the surveys have illustrated the importance of "socio-culture", "organizational" and "economic context" to enhance the skills of the employees working at the front office in a hotel. As looking into the past records of the working strategies in the hospitality sector, it has a significant impact on the business growth in this competitive market. Also due to the multiple growth of multiple ownership there has been made significant changes in the hotel sectors which results in increasing the hotel's reputation[10].

In the growing age of development of technologies, the activities performed by the employees in the front office at the hotel has been enhanced or some significant changes were brought into it. Use of internet for the communications and contact along with the set of allies in the form of "specialist providers" has proved a significant role in changing the operations carried out in the hotel. This technologies used in the hotel operations had led to higher customer's expectation towards the services offered to them [11].

The work related to the enhancement of the hospitality sector characterized in both "press" and "academic literature" as there is lack of high skill professionals in hospitality sector. Some researchers have also mentioned the same thing in very brutal manner by stating, "Uneducated, unmotivated, untrained, unskilled and unproductive" [12].

Speaking about the hospitality sector in Japan, there has been rapid growth in the tourism as Japan is one of the most famous tourist destinations around the globe. Hence there is a significant growth in GDP. The report has been prepared by conducting an analysis from "Japan National Tourism Administration" (JNTA), the total count of visitors

in the year 2018 was 108.03 billion, 17.85% over the year 2017 and 10.36 over 2016. The foreign exchange income reached about 24.6 billion dollars up 46.7% and 25.25% respectively over 2017 and 2016. The record in 2005 of the foreign travellers was great near about 27.4 billion. And the growth rate was 41.6% over 2017; the domestic tourism of Japan was developed very fast in 2018, with the total number of 2.2 billion visitor up to 25.55% over 2017 and 24.41% over 2016 with the net income of 461.06 billion, up 22.79% and 29.42% respectively over 2017 and 2016.

## METHODOLOGY

An analysis has been conducted of the skill profiles, the nature of work, various skills, techniques and the approach of the employees working in the front office of the hotel. According to this analysis, appropriate training programs can be organized for the development of the career. This study will be essential for the “Human Resource Management”. The survey was conducted in the various cities of Japan such as Tokyo, Yokohama, Nagoya and Nara. And the target was to conduct the analysis of best 5 star hotels in the cities. It was pursued in the form of an interview with the front office staff of the hotel. Around 340 questionnaires were delivered and 281 were responded by the hotel staff, wherein among the responded staff, the female percentage was 63%. 66% of the total respondents were working in the business hotel 19% were beach resort and 5% were conference hotels.

## RESULTS

The respondents categories was divided into 5 parts – Trainee, junior staff member, senior staff member, Supervisor and the Department manager (Table 1). All the staff was directly linked with the reception job, wherein 22% are associated with the job of reservations, cash desk exchange, accounts, engage 15% of the selected group, concierge 10%, telephone operator 8%, marketing and sales 8%.

It was concluded from the analysis that most of the staffs working in the hotels were graduates from

various professional schools and Tourism College. Out of which 48% were diploma certificate holder and 27% were technical school graduate, 19 % have secured bachelors degree (Table 2).

Position of respondents	Number (n=281)	Valid per cent
Trainee	28	9.8
Junior staff member	169	60.9
Senior staff member	45	15.8
Supervisor	29	10.2
Department Manager	10	3.3

**Table 1 – Position of Respondents**

Educational level	Number (n=281)	Valid per cent
Master degree	12	4
Bachelors	49	17.1
Certificate/diploma	136	48.9
Vocational/technical	73	26.1
Secondary/high school	12	3.9
Primary/elementary	0	0

**Table 2 – Educational attainment**

Among the 74% of the hotel respondents, the employee which is currently working there had his first work experience. But only 31% employees surveyed plan to stay in the current job for between 1-5 years, 28% want to remain in the job for less than a year (Table 3). This states the working environment of the hotel.

How long do you plan to remain in current job	Number (n=281)	Valid per cent
No plans at this stage	117	41.7
1 year-5 year	86	30.9
6 month-1 year	55	19.4
Less than 6 month	23	8.0

**Table 3 – Plans to remain in current job**

Talking about the career plans, (Table 4) illustrates that the majority of the employees working in the hotel are willing to have their next generation working in the hotel sector itself. Majority of the working employees also commit themselves to the “Hotel Industry” in Japan. (Table 5) illustrates uncertainty from the job perspective. Many numbers of respondents were not expecting the promotion or development from their organization.

Career move	Number (n=281)	Valid per cent
Move out of the hotel sector	50	17.8
Move to another hotel	16	5.4
Move elsewhere in this hotel	27	9.4
Promotion in my current job	148	53.3
Other	40	14.1

**Table 4 - Next Career move**

Promotion and development in my hotel are	Number (n=281)	Valid per cent
Poor	29	10.1
Satisfactory	119	42.6
Excellent	24	8.3
Don't know	109	39.1

**Table 5 - Opportunities for promotion and development in the current job**

The task was to collect the answer of some set of queries from the employees, wherein the respondents were asked to rate the statements from the scale of 1 to 5. 1- “Agrees to the statement” and 2- “disagree with the statement” (Table 6).

Statement about hotel front office work	Mean response on five-point scale	Number (n=281)
A specialist college course (in hospitality) is useful for front office work	3.60	281
Front office is my preferred field for work and career progression	3.74	281
My area of work is well respected by my family and friends	3.77	281
Front office work is all about personality	3.84	281
Most work in front office is common sense	3.93	281
I would like the opportunity to work in other areas of the hotel industry	3.94	281
I enjoy the use of technology within my job	4.11	281
I enjoy the organizational parts of my job	4.16	281
I enjoy meeting and greeting customers within my job	4.19	281
Front office work is a challenging and demanding area of work	4.30	281

**Table 6 – Working in Hotel Front Office**

Significance of soft skills in the work office also been rated at the scale of 1 to 5, wherein 1 tends to “very low importance” and 5 tends to “very high importance” for the factors involved in the soft skills (Table 7).

Importance of skills	Mean response on five-point scale	Number (n=281)
Use of technology	4.12	281
Marketing	4.16	281
Accounting	4.17	281
Interpersonal	4.18	281
Customer care	4.25	281
Use of FO equipment	4.29	281
Leadership qualities	4.33	281
Teamwork	4.44	281
Communication (Oral)	4.56	281

**Table – 7 Importance of skills in front office work**

## CONCLUSION

It was concluded that there is need of better quality of human resources in Japan. The employees holding bachelor's and master's degree are not willing to stay for the longer time working in the front office of the hotel as they are paid with very low salaries and the workload is heavy, they do not expect any promotions from the organization. There should be organized certain training programs to improve the skills of the employees working at the front office. Actually, the significant skills required for the employees working at the front office is developed from the professional schools or vocational schools. So there is need to develop the training programs in the professional schools. And



the employees should be provided better working environment and should be given reasonable salary package. Most of the employees don't have any idea of their future career, they are not sure about their current work, more specifically, they do not know for how long they are going to work in the same hotel. This will collapse the confidence and the working spirit of the employees. Special training programs for the development of the staffs working in the front office will help to improve the skills of delivering their services to the customer. And this is to be termed as "pre-work" training.

At last, the skill set of the employees is proved to be more essential for the growth of hospitality industry. This defines the quality of service from the customer's point of view. This will help in maintaining the strong position in the competitive market. This paper illustrates the reasons to develop the potential skills of the employees working in the front office of the hotel.

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