teaching note

Hotel Management Trainee Programs: Are They Effective?
By Shenee Douglas, Selim Bakir and Baker Ayoun

Case Study Summary and Background

Many hotel companies today have their own corporate universities, which offer training, development workshops, and hospitality certifications to their employees. Hotel companies such as Marriott International, Accor Hotels, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, Sandals Resorts International, and InterContinental Hotels Group are known to offer these programs. These initiatives prepare employees for future positions in the company. Due to the shortage of labor and high turnover rates in the industry, these initiatives have proven to be beneficial to hotels. Initiatives such as management training programs (MTP) allow for the hotel to respond quickly to changes in the external environment (recession, natural disasters, climate change, COVID-19) as well as to develop and train future managers and leaders to become more adaptable and flexible. Hotels with adequately trained and experienced managers are more likely to see an improvement in performance and help to increase coordination and communication within and between departments (Bardi, 2006; Choi et al., 2009). As a succession management initiative, MTP helps to alleviate the shortage of qualified candidates who can fill vacant managerial positions. Therefore, it is important for hotels to ensure that these programs are effective as an ineffective program may lead to hotel objectives not being met, notably, negative financial consequences. This case study looks at how the effectiveness of MTPs can be evaluated, assesses four current MTPs to identify common factors and addresses the possible consequences of an ineffective MTP through the examination of a dilemma at The Pegassoo Hotel in Rhodes, Greece.

Jake is a graduate of a 12-month management trainee program at Pegassoo Hotel. He has three years of previous work experience and a bachelor's degree in hospitality. Jake graduates from the program even though he passes the comprehensive exam with a low score and is assigned as a front desk manager. Jake fails to protect the safety and privacy of his guests, after sharing the room number and in-house guest list with the director of a travel agency. Further, his lack of coordination with other departments resulted in important information going unnoticed. The guest whose privacy and safety were breached, files a formal complaint which triggers a re-evaluation of Jake's performance in the management trainee program and calls into question the effectiveness of the program.

Target Audience

The target audience of this case study includes the following:
- Senior undergraduate level lodging operations students and graduate level students of HR, strategic management and hotel management courses.
- Workshops and training programs for human resources employees in the hotel industry.
- Human Resources, professional development, and/ or internship preparation courses.

Student Learning Objectives

- Familiarize students with the different roles and activities of the MTPs
- Identify key factors that can make MTPs effective
- Identify factors that may cause MTPs to fail or be less effective.
- Discuss the role and importance of the MTPs and their relations with human resources departments in hotel companies.
- Discuss the potential implications of ineffective MTPs on the hotel.

Teaching Approach and Strategy

Learning Prerequisites

Before assigning the case, students should have prior knowledge of management and human resources. In addition, to provide a better understanding, it would be helpful if students had prior exposure to hospitality and/or service industries operations.

Lesson Plan

The recommended teaching strategy for the case study relies on two 60-minute class meetings. The first 60-minute class could be used to prepare students either online or in a face-to-face meeting ahead of the scheduled class activities. Components of the first class can include lectures on fundamental human resources management training and development programs and in particular MTPs, training effectiveness and the different methods used to evaluate these programs. The second 60-minute class will be the administration of the case study as per the suggested lesson plan below. Students can be divided into small groups to discuss the case scenario, answer the discussion questions, and present their findings to the class.

First 60-minute class

1. Introduction - a brief introduction to management training programs and the learning objectives. (*5 minutes*)
2. Lecture - components should include fundamentals of HR management training and development programs and in particular MTPs, training effectiveness and the different methods used to evaluate these programs. Active participation of students in the lecture would be recommended. Utilize PowerPoint slides, videos and in-class interactive program to create a student-centered learning environment (*45 minutes*)
3. Guest lecturer - an industry professional could be invited to share current industry practices in management and leadership programs. In addition, talking about the characteristics of the MTP at their hotel, how they are implemented and evaluated for effectiveness in their hotel. (*30 minutes*) (Optional)
4. Discussion Session - students should engage with the instructor and/or guest lecturer in a Q&A session (*10 minutes*)

Assignment - Students should read suggested readings and case study as homework

Second 60-minute class

1. Introduction to the case study - give a brief introduction of the case study and divide students into small groups. (*5 minutes*)
2. Read and discuss the case study - students will read the case study, highlighting important points and answer discussion questions (*40 minutes*)
3. Presentation - Each group will present their answers to the class. (*10 minutes*)
4. Assessment discussion - discuss in detail how students will be assessed (*10 minutes*)

Assessment may be conducted in another session or as homework.

Possible Answers to Discussion Questions

1. How can The Pegassoo Hotel maintain the same level of standards between curriculums within its MTP?

   Each curriculum should have clearly outlined achievable objectives and outcomes that are continuously reviewed to meet the changing demand of the hotels. Other answers may include periodical assessment and evaluation of curriculum components.

2. Which criteria should be employed by MTP coordinators in placing the candidate in the correct program that triggers his/her skills to be used more effectively?

   Answers may include evaluating university or college transcripts. reviewing the candidate's resume and conducting personality and aptitude tests to determine program suitability.

3. What are the competency gaps found in the case and what can the managers of MTPs do to lessen these gaps?

   Possible answers may include interpersonal competencies (awareness of customer's needs, guest privacy and safety, commitment to service quality, etc.), soft skill competencies (Failing to maintain the coordination among the units, decision making, professionalism, etc) and leadership competencies (empathy, strategic/critical thinking, etc). In addition, the managers should ensure that the methods used to improve these competencies actually do what they were designed to do. Provide mentorship sessions to recover or to refresh the procedures and evaluate candidates to identify learning opportunities geared towards closing the gap while continuously monitoring progress.

4. How often should graduates of MTPs receive refreshment courses? Provide reasons.

   The Pegasso Hotel operates on a seasonal basis. In this case, two refreshment courses per year should be employed. The first session would be at the beginning of the season in April focusing on refreshing core competencies and procedures since the employees do not work during the off-season. The second should be in October and is aimed at evaluating the performance of these competencies. One reason may be that continuous exposure to these courses may lead to greater retention of knowledge and more opportunities for applying theory to practice. In addition, as the goals and objectives of the hotel change, so do the core competencies and procedures.

5. What other implications could Jake's actions have for the hotel?

   Possible answers include:
   1. *The guest could file a lawsuit in which the hotel would be required to pay compensation*
   2. *The guest may complain to the hoteliers union which may result in the hotel being penalized*
   3. *The guest may complain to the tour agency seeking compensation*
   4. *The agency might complain, sue or stop working with the hotel and/or ask for compensation*
   5. *This incident could negatively affect the image and reputation of the hotel resulting in a loss of revenue*

6. Are Jake's actions his failure, or reflective of issues that may be beyond an MTP participant? Discuss

   If yes, students may discuss not following hotel safety and security policies, not consulting other senior managers, not contacting the guest prior to opening the door using the master key (call the room or knock before opening), sending security (loss prevention officer) to check instead among other actions.

   If not, students may discuss external factors which refers to factors outside of Jake's control that could have led to his failure. These may include a history of having a very close informal relationship with the travel agency workers formed prior to Jake taking on the position. The hotel might have been experiencing high occupancy and in an effort to quickly resolve the issue, Jake made a mistake. Lack of interdepartmental communication or coordination, power harassment from the operations director of ACE, and the effectiveness of the MTP.

7. Identify the factors that make up the MTP at The Pegassoo Hotel that detract from the effectiveness of the program.

    The program length may be too short to ensure that candidates can fully grasp the concepts in the different departments. Methods of teaching may not be suitable to produce the expected outcomes. Instructors of the MTP may not be qualified to teach. There might be a lack of mentor/candidate hours. Previous experience and university degrees might not have covered the missing content in the MTP program. The program pass rate of seventy percent might be too low and should be increased. The contents of the course or curriculum are not assessed appropriately.

8. Evaluate the current MTP at The Pegassoo Hotel by comparing it with any other MTP and provide recommendations to improve Pegassoo's program.

    Answers could focus on the factors that make up the program including recruitment and selection, assessment, training delivery, quality of instructors, etc. The focus could also be placed on post-program evaluation and continuous training. Look at the similarities and differences between the MTPs and recommend changes that would best fit Pegassoo's needs.

Suggested Assessments

Senior undergraduate level students can be assessed using a quiz that includes a mix of multiple-choice and essay questions to determine how well the students grasped the information from the case study. Graduate level students could be asked to choose a current management training program at a hotel not mentioned in the case and identify the main characteristics of the program. Students could be asked to evaluate the program for factors that may lead to failure (implementation, recruitment process, assessment of program participants, etc.) and provide recommendations that may improve the perceived effectiveness of the program. Students could also be asked to devise an outline for a management re-training plan for Jake that will help to improve his managerial skills. Assignments may be done individually or in small groups. This assignment can be scaled up or down to be used as a class assignment or as a final project for the course.

References

Bardi, J. (2006). *Hotel front office management* (4th ed.). Pennsylvania: John Wiley & Sons

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.

Suggested Readings

Dolasinski, M. & Reynolds, J. (2019). Hotel leader competencies: Industry practitioner perspectives. Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism, 18(3), 349-367.

Laura L. Methot, W. Larry Williams, Anne Cummings & Beth Bradshaw (1996) Measuring the Effects of a Manager-Supervisor Training Program Through the Generalized Performance of Managers, Supervisors, Front-Line Staff and Clients in a Human Service Setting, Journal of Organizational Behavior Management, 16:2, 3-34, DOI: 10.1300/J075v16n02_02

Marriott International – Marriott Voyage Program Retrieved from https://university.marriott.com/post graduates/#:~:text=Voyage%20is%20Marriott%20International%E2%80%99s%2012-18%20 month%2C%20award-winning%20global,leaders%20of%20the%20company%20 across%20Marriott%E2%80%99s%20hotel%20brands.

Mohanty, P. C., Dash, M., Dash, M., & Das, S. (2019). A study on factors influencing training effectiveness. Revista Espacios, 40, 7-15.

Self, T. T., Gordon, S., & Jolly, P. M. (2019). Talent management: A Delphi study of assessing and developing GenZ hospitality leaders. International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 31:10

Talawanich, S., & Wattanacharoensil, W. (2021). Transforming graduates into successful hotel management trainees: Exploring important management trainee competencies. Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism, 21(1), 43-71.

Vasiliadis, L., Belias, D., & Zaftis, E. (2020). Knowledge management on hotels: The case of Greek hotels. In Strategic Innovative Marketing and Tourism (pp. 991-998). Springer, Cham.