

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines contemporary human resource management (HRM) in the hotel industry in Taiwan. The hotel industry and the effective management of its human resources are of great economic significance for Taiwan, given the government's plans for doubling the number of international arrivals between 2002 and 2008 (Tourism Bureau 2005b). Yet previous research on this topic is scarce, consisting of only four studies, three of them unpublished Master's theses. Access to two of the studies is limited and all four studies have adopted a 'single issue' perspective in their investigation. This study has attempted a broader perspective, inviting exploration in an open-ended way of a range of contemporary issues and concerns. It also offers a literature review intended as a significant contribution in its own right, in its attempt to locate research helpful to the Taiwanese hotel industry.

The specific aims of this study were to explore the way managers in the hotel industry are thinking about what they identify as concerns, the HRM issues and practices they perceive as important in employee management, and the future plans they have for HRM. The data were gathered from the manager which each hotel identified as being best placed to discuss these issues. Findings from this study are presented with interpretation and commentary offered to compare the themes raised in this study with those identified in the literature.

Given the high proportion of quantitative studies in hospitality industry research across the world (Lucas and Deery 2004), a qualitative method is utilised in this research and in-depth interviews were chosen as the main vehicle for data collection. The characteristics of such qualitative research are exploratory and descriptive, creating a data set that is not possible to obtain through written questionnaires and surveys. Twenty-eight hotels were approached and fourteen hotels participated in this research, representing a 50 per cent response rate.

The results suggest that most participating hotels are focused on dealing with the day-to-day operational challenges of shortages of appropriately skilled staff, seasonal variations in workforce demand and employee turnover. While they perceive these issues as significant and challenging, they were mostly inclined to view these as 'facts of life' in the industry, and were relatively limited in their thinking about more fundamental and strategic solutions for dealing with them. However, some hotels are developing more innovative approaches to effectively engaging with these challenges, such as participating in joint-training programs with other hotels; developing long-term relationships with internship students; increasing employee empowerment and using the Balanced Scorecard (Nair 2004; Niven 2006) in performance management.

This study explores some ways in which these practical initiatives could be taken further. It also takes up a key theme which emerged from the interviews, namely the vital importance of developing sound customer service cultures and practices. Some practical ideas are explored to assist in this respect. On the bases of these findings, this study also concludes that human resource managers have a valuable

role to play in the executive management teams of hotels. This role needs to be further developed and encouraged. The current and emerging challenges facing the industry demand an approach to HRM which is far more strategic than the traditional focus of personnel administration; instead, HRM has a key role to play in creating and sustaining competitive advantage in organisations.

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DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Hui-O Yang
Melbourne, Australia
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