

Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts' People and Culture Strategy in Deriving Employee Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts was founded by the Malaysian Chinese tycoon Robert Kuok in 1971 and maintained by Westin until January 1983. The head office is positioned in central Hong-Kong. The purpose of this report is to identify how people and culture strategy implemented by Shangri-La Hotels drives the success of the hotel as the most notable luxurious hotels in Asia. Data was collected through company websites and review websites to identify and analyse Shangri-La's success journey and pitfalls in being one of the top hotels in Asia. The empirical findings provide insights for Shangri-La's management on its people and culture strategy that focuses on its employees more rather than its luxurious outlook.

Keywords: employee satisfaction, hospitality industry, people and culture strategy, Shangri-La

INTRODUCTION

Shangri-La Hotels (M) Berhad is an investment holding company and also a public limited company. The headquarters is in Batu Ferringhi Beach, Penang. Shangri-La Hotels (M) Berhad is engaged in providing hospitality services such as hotels and beach resorts, golf course and clubhouse, and commercial laundry. The company has two segments, which include hotels, resorts and golf course, and investment properties, which includes rental from offices, shop lots and apartment and rental of car parks, and others, which include commercial laundry services and investment holding (Shangri-La's Rasa Sayang Resort & Spa Penang, n.d.).

Shangri-La Hotels (M) Berhad has many hotel and resort branches in many states and locations namely, Hotel Jen Puteri Harbour, Johor Bahru, Shangri-La's Rasa Ria Resort & Spa, Kota Kinabalu, Shangri-La's Tanjung Aru Resort & Spa, Kota Kinabalu, Shangri-La Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, Traders Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, Golden Sands Resort, Penang, Shangri-La's Rasa Sayang Resort & Spa, Penang, and Hotel Jen, Penang (Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts, 2020).

Shangri-La Hotels (M) Berhad vision to achieve its goal to be the best hotel is "to be the first choice for our guest, colleagues, shareholders and business partners". Whereas its

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mission is “to delight our guests every time by creating engaging experiences straight from our hearts”.

Literature Review

People and Culture Strategy in Hospitality Industries

People and culture strategy refer to Human Resource Managements' actions or implications that ensure that all staff and employees are up to speed with the organization's mission and goals. Hospitality industries like Shangri-La Hotels are based on employee engagement. This is because these hospitality industries are customer service driven and their employees are the key ambassador of the organization. Hence, it is necessary to foster employee engagement as the employees' service method creates the fine line between a happy and irate customer (Kurtzman, 2017).

People's strategy is defined as a business strategy that lays out how an organization intends to use its important assets: employees and staff, to deliver on its objectives (HFInsight, 2016). In accordance to that, hospitality industries must constantly ensure that their employees are satisfied with the work (Berry, 1997). This is because an organization tends to be more successful in doing its service when their employees are satisfied (Robbins & Judge, 2007) , as they become more important to the organization as an effective labor force (Masri, 2009). Additionally, cultivating employee engagement is also correlated to organizational commitment. The higher the employee engagement, the higher the organizational commitment will be, especially affective commitment (Kazlauskaite et al , 2006)

On the other hand, organizational culture is considered as one of the strongest and significant organizational variables. Every organization has a unique culture (Kalaiarasi & Sethuram, 2017). Organizational culture can promote well-being in employees as well as can affect employees' well -being. It may cause harmful effects on employees' health (stress). Therefore, supervisors should promote employee well-being by monitoring and strengthening the characteristic of organizational culture. Besides, they should also provide support and manage workers who are coping with characteristic of culture that can potentially be harmful to their health (Lopez-Martin & Topa, 2020). Organizations using people strategy need to find ways to impose the corporate and organizational culture to ensure that control is maintained by the original organization (HFInsight, 2016). A company may bestow a treat upon itself when its rising leaders align culture with strategy. It is common that many businesses forget the importance of culture and positions strategy first. Company culture is defined as taking care of each other to do more for the world with products and services offered. When culture is aligned strategy, the limits of traditional business conduct is elevated (Craig, 2018). Shangri-La Hotels has indulged in people and cultural strategies to overcome some of the challenges that it faces because lining up people strategy with business strategy affects how employees are deployed. People and cultural strategy are one of its dominant factors striving it to reach its immense success today. This concludes the reason people and cultural strategy is considered as probably one of the most important documents in the modern organization, especially in terms of increasing profitability, productivity, employee experience, and customer satisfaction (People and Culture Strategy, n.d.).

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Shangri- La Academy Program

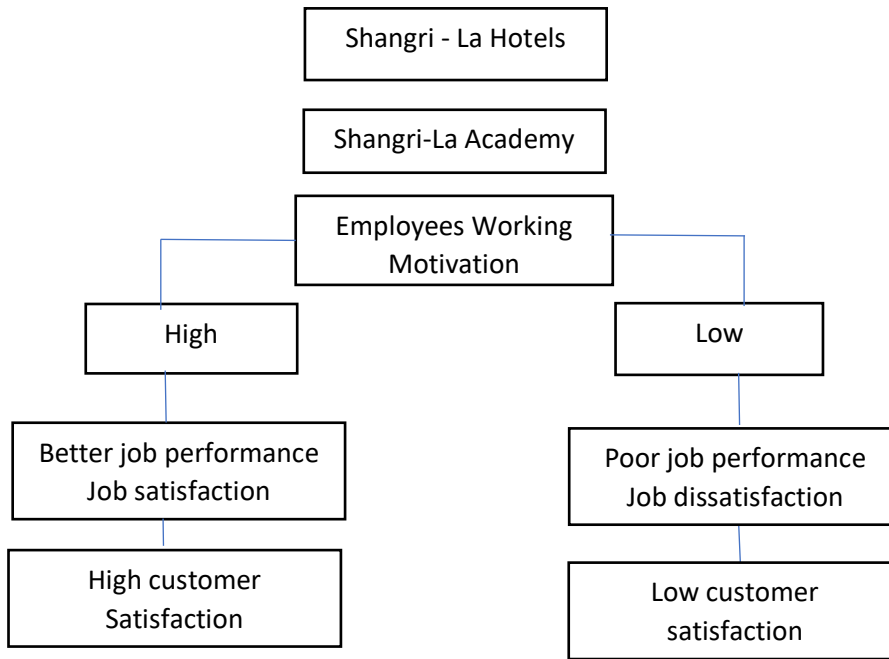
Training and development refer to the acquisition of understanding, know-how, techniques, and practices (Sal & Raja, 2016). According to McDowall and Saunders (2010), it was stated that investment in employee development is highly influenced by intense competition in the business environment and it is important determining the relative organizational success. Employee development highly influences employee performance, work behaviour, and work motivation (Regen et al.,2020).

Therefore, unlike other hotels, Shangri-La employees are required to undergo a training period in the Shangri-La Academy Program before providing service to the hotel's customer. Shangri-La Academy Program offers a certification program, diploma, short course programs for professionals at all levels. Some of these courses include a Certificate in Food and Beverage Service Operation, Certificate in Front Office Operation. Certificate in Culinary Arts and many more. Not only that, but this academy also conducts workshops and seminars for all professionals in hotel operation, management, and English (Fandianto & Sutanto, 2012).

According to Partlow (1996), a good training design developed by an organization can produce good results, especially if it is according to the need of the employees as well as to the organization. Hence, Shangri-La Academy provides various types of training because it ensures that employees get the knowledge of their work in a better way (Deming & Edwards, 1982) that can help them to perform high-quality service. This is because learning in a practical and hands-on manner is much more effective than learning and training with only book knowledge (Flynn et al., 1995). The organization must design the training very carefully (Armstrong, 2000). Training design plays a very vital role in moulding employees as well as organizational performance, and a bad training design is nothing but the loss of time and money (Tsaur & Lin, 2004).

This program can provide Shangri-La Hotel management with further data about employees' job performance, satisfaction, and even customer satisfaction. This can be further explained in Diagram 1.

Diagram 1: Research Analysis of Shangri-La Hotels Academy



Communication Platform

Achieving effective communication in an organization is challenging. Katie Henke, General Manager of The Peninsula Paris, once said that the real luxury element is the service, which is not what you can touch but what you can feel (Godfrey, n.d.). Hence, per that, Shangri- La Hotels has put extra effort and taken a more emotional approach in its communication.

Shangri-La's 'It's in our Nature' campaign expresses the group's distinctive philosophy of hospitality and focuses on Shangri-La primary culture 'embracing people from the heart and treating them like family'. There is evidence that effective communication is one of the key elements for keeping an enterprise, as a system of individuals, working together for objectives. (Blazenaite, 2012). Hence, Shangri-La strongly and firmly claims that its colleagues' genuine care and respect for its guests and each other are the truly distinctive kind of Asian hospitality that the hotel offers. (Macleod, 2020). Shangri-La Hotels inspire and guide their employees' behavior from A to Z. (Zwijze-Koning & de Jong, 2005) highlighted that "The importance of communication for the effectiveness of organizations and the well-being and motivation of employees is undisputed". This is because, according to (Morley et al 2002), organizations can have the best of both worlds which is to have positive work environments and be more effective in achieving their objectives if they develop effective communication processes. In this way, it is undeniable that communication increases job satisfaction for employees and better bottom-line benefits for the organization (Hargie, Owen, 2016).

Shangri-La Hotels also ensures that they have well defined organizational structure with key responsibilities because it can affect the overall behavior of firms and the situations and behavior of individuals and subunits within the firm (DeCanio et al, 2000). The hotel

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is well known for its formality and hierarchical leadership structure. The hotel also implements a top down system management, whereas the authority is passed from the top-level management to its subordinates (Chris, 2014). This helps to empower employees as they feel like their opinions and point of views are always mattered. Besides, the hotel also gives great emphasis on communicating information relating to business plan and performance to employees as to encourage participation and to create awareness of the financial and economic factors affecting the group (Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts, 2020).

In conclusion, Shangri-La Hotels' effort in embracing employee development and developing an effective communicating platform within the internal organization is very visible. According to Boon et al., (2006), teamwork, reward and recognition, training and development, and communication are positively related to employees' commitment. Employees' commitment and engagement are highly affected by the internal communications of an organization. There should be two-way (bidirectional) communication between administrative staff, middle managers, and top managers. They should create an environment that encourages bottom-up communication (hierarchical communication), as well as engaging staff and benefiting the organization from its consequences. (Mohammad Javadi & Davardoost, 2019). Hence, moving forward, Shangri-La Hotels should effectively use the organizational resources (Daft et al., 2000) and have good communication with employees to ensure that employees have multiple goals and that they address quality of output as well as quantity to further achieve the organizational goals (Rao, 2009). Even though, Shangri-La Hotels might face various barriers in achieving this, the managers must remember that organizational effectiveness will be the result of good organizational culture (Young et al., 2011) and adoptive cultural orientations and achievement directly affect performance (Xenikou & Simosi, 2006).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research methods refer to the methods or ways used to gather data regarding a specific topic or research title. Primary data was collected by conducting a survey based on online reviews, pros, and cons related to Shangri-La Hotels (M) Berhad. Whereas secondary data used in this report was collected online or through Internet research. The data was gathered by browsing through different online resources related to Shangri-La Hotel and Resorts. Some of these sources include online magazines, newspapers, official websites, review websites, and many more. All the data collected were further analyzed and interpreted to be coherent with our research title to assist us in preparing this report.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An online survey was conducted to analyse the pros and cons of working in Shangri-La Hotels in Malaysia. The survey consisted a sample of 330 reviews given by current employees of Shangri-La Hotels in Malaysia. From the survey, the following pros and cons of working in Shangri-La hotels in Malaysia were identified and summarised in the table below.

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Table 1: Pros and Cons of working in Shangri-La

Pros	Cons
Good staff welfare	Heavy workload
Friendly co-workers/ colleagues	Stress
Good brand	Poor management (Hierarchy)
Efficient training culture	Less compensation
High compensation	No feedback in performances
Satisfying working experience	Staff cultural issues
Have opportunity to grow in career	Poor communication
Good management	Limited decision-making freedom
	Ineffective departments

Table 2: Rating stars by employees

Rating stars	Frequency	Number
5	108	32.73%
4	94	28.48%
3	72	21.82%
2	36	10.91%
1	20	6.06%
Total employees	330	100%

From the table, employees are very satisfied working at Shangri-La Hotels in Malaysia as 33% gave 5 stars and 28% gave 4 stars. Less than 20% of the employees are not satisfied working in Shangri-La Hotels as 11% gave 2 stars and 6% gave 1 star.

Table 3: Pros of working in Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts

Advantages	Frequency	Percentage
Good staff welfare	56	16.97%
Friendly co-workers/colleagues	52	15.76%
Good brand	50	15.15%
Efficient training culture	45	13.64%
High compensation	37	11.21%
Satisfying working experiences	36	10.91%
Good management	18	5.45%
Have opportunity to grow	29	8.79%
No pros	7	2.12%
Total	330	100%

From the table, 17% of the reviews stated that they liked to work in Shangri-La Hotels because of its good staff welfare, 16% stated that it was because of friendly colleagues, 15% said that it was because of its good brand image and 14% of the reviews stated that it was because of Shangri-La's efficient training culture.

Table 4: Cons of working in Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts

Cons	Frequency	Percentage
Workload	79	23.94%
No Cons	69	20.19%
Stress	45	13.64%
Poor management (Hierarchy)	42	12.73%
Less paid	30	9.09%
Staff cultural issues	18	5.45%
No feedback for performance	18	5.45%
Poor communication	12	3.64%
Limited decision freedom	10	3.03%
Ineffective departments	7	2.12%
Total	330	100%

Based on Table 4, 24% of the employees stated that the cons of working in Shangri-La is because of its heavy workload, and 21% stated that there are no downsides of working there. Moreover, 14% and 13% stated that high stress levels and poor management respectively are the cons of working in Shangri-La Hotels.

Discussions

Integrative model of organizational behaviour that we learned in Organization Behaviour shows three mechanisms namely, organizational mechanism, group mechanism and also individual mechanism and individual characteristics that lead to individual outcomes. According to our group research, we found out the elements of this model is correlation to the success of Shangri-La Hotel and Resorts throughout these years.

Organization culture is one of the elements of organizational mechanisms. It is a system that sharing similar values, beliefs and behaviours which will causes how people behave in organization. Shangri-La Hotel and Resorts possess a great culture of thoughtful service that they anticipate what people needs and they fulfil them. They set out to do three things: to look after staffs, guests, and shareholders. Based on the documents we searched through internet, we found out that the strongest competitive advantage i.e. the key factor of success of Shangri-La Hotel and Resorts is their quality of services provided by their employees. Shangri-La is highly praised and appreciated by the public on its world class service and gracious hospitality. Their high-quality services brought them a good reputation throughout Asia.

We continue to do a further research on the reasons behind the quality of services provided by employees. Ultimately, we found that “treat your employees like how you want them to treat your customers” is Shangri-La’s famous management quote. Shangri-La achieve its success by sticking to this quote. This is the main reason why most of the employees stated that they have a good treat as a Shangri-La staff. Each of the trainee received a small book printed with their brand manifesto upon the training to remind them on delivering an exceptional culture of warm hospitality. Shangri-La Hotel and Resorts has its own training procedure. Brand’s mission statement and the core values of

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organization which are humility, sincerely, courtesy, helpfulness and selflessness are the first thing they conducted to every employee once they joined Shangri-La. Therefore, employees know instinctively what it means to delight their guests and deliver hospitality from heart.

Furthermore, employees are trained to have positive personalities and cultural values in their training sessions. The organization start running an education project called "Shangri-La Academy" since 2005. The centralized employee training center is in Asia-Pacific. Employees will be arranged to attend a twelfth-weeks lesson in several kind of professional skills such as food and beverage service, front office organization, housekeeping operations, or culinary arts. After finishing the lesson, a 24-weeks practical job training at Shangri-La hotels is provided to them to train them to become a good manner and excellent servicer. Hence, their newbies job performance always stands out as compared to other organizations' newbies. In additional, a unique feature of Shangri-La's training program is that employees are trained on different cultures and beliefs. For instance, employees are educated that the number '4' is unlucky in Chinese customs and hence level '4' is normally replaced by level '3A'. Their well-trained employees made them an undisputed leader in Asian hospitality.

Customer is the king. Service providers in the hospitality industry must always make sure their 'king' is delighted with their services. Mistakes can damage their organization's reputation, but it is a human nature to not be perfect and employees make mistakes sometime. In overcoming this problem, Shangri-La Hotel and Resorts has a unique procedure in recovering mistakes to gain further loyalty from their guests. When mistakes happen, a well-done recovery may be an opportunity to gain further commitment and loyalty, and the other way around if recovery is poor. The 5 gold steps to recover as developed by Shangri-La hotels are listen, apologies, delight, fix the problem and follow up. These recovery steps may reduce their working stress in the future when they start interacting with Shangri-La's high requirement guests. The less stress will enhance their job performance and followed by a goodwill towards the organization.

In addition, Shangri-La Hotel and Resorts value their employees' problems solving ability. They train employees to be a good decision maker other than build their critical thinking skill during the training program, especially the program for the front-line employees to make sure they have their own ability to take a proper action when they face problems. After they possess this ability, they can perform their job individually and this is called autonomy which it will enhance employees job satisfaction. Hence, they have more space and opportunity to grow other than increase their affective commitment to Shangri-La Hotel and Resorts.

Other than training programs to new employees, it is a group requirement that all permanent employees in every hotel, irrespective of service level, age or gender, must at least undertake a full day's orientation program and also four-day Shangri-La hotel care service culture learning program to improve their service quality from time to time. These programs are additional to the comprehensive skill training that are tailored to each individual job position and is based on the intrinsic abilities of employees. The success of these programs is measured by a performance monitor, measuring items such as customer satisfaction and willingness to recommend the hotel to others. The feedbacks from customers can show them how well they worked and how much they

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can improve themselves in providing quality service. Feedbacks are helpful for employees to keep on growing in their working positions. Job satisfaction will also be increased since they can get to know of their result.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the success and growth of a business entity does not only rely on the hands of a world class management. Employees who are motivated, talented, and experienced are very well needed to receive immense success in an industry. Shangri-La Hotels' people and cultural strategy has gone a long way in deriving employee satisfaction, resulting in the growth and glory Shangri-La Hotels is experiencing today. The use of cultural training program in everyday performance lines out the best possible way service personnel should serve their customers. On the other hand, Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts also provides ample of training for their employees to improve their job performances. Happy and satisfied employees lead to happy customers which in turn path the way for a successful organization. Shangri-La care towards its employees by giving satisfactory compensation, efficient training culture and good management has resulted in greater employee satisfaction which in turn produced well-trained employees. Undoubtedly, their well-trained employees besides their luxurious outlook has made them to be one of the top luxurious hotels in Asian and Western markets. So, Shangri-La's dedication in training its employees to possess full professionalism in providing service is undeniably one of the hotel's strong and dominant element to success.

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