

COVID-19 AND THE REVISED SET OF EMPLOYEE EXPECTATIONS IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

ADITI NIMESH RUGHANI

Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University

ABSTRACT

The first case of COVID-19 in India was reported on 30th January 2020 in Kerala. According to the recent update from the online portal, World meter, as on 23rd December 2020 there are 10,099,308 confirmed cases of COVID-19 since 8th April 2020. Amidst the mounting cases of the virus, Prime Minister, **Shri. Narendra Modi**, has had announced multiple phases of Lockdown and Unlock process.

One of the sectors that has been largely affected due to the pandemic is the Hotel industry. Consequently, a myriad of job losses and pay cuts have led to an environment of diminishing “Organizational Commitment” of the employees. Porter et al (1974, p 604) describes organizational commitment as “*an attachment to the organization, characterized by an intention to remain in it; an identification with the values and goals of the organization; and a willingness to exert extra effort on its behalf*”. Thus, it becomes very crucial for the HR managers to ensure that employees are able to regain the same level of loyalty towards the organization and work with the longstanding vim and vigor.

In the following research, I have made an attempt to comprehend the novel set of expectations that the employees possess after rejoining the workplace, in context to the Hotel industry, on account of COVID-19 Pandemic. Survey method was employed in carrying out the following research. It is a Basic research with Primary information compiled on Simple Random Sampling basis.

Keywords: Hospitality, Covid-19, Hotel Industry, Employee Expectations, Qualitative, Survey

INTRODUCTION

The first human case of COVID-19 was detected in Wuhan, China in December 2019. The virus then spread like a wildfire across the world. The occurrence of the virus was escalated to an extent of becoming a global Pandemic.

One of the major disastrous effects of pandemic in India is the loss of jobs and pay-cuts in the hospitality sector. The pandemic has crippled the sector and raised grave questions about the survival of the industry. As a result, the industry has also witnessed a plummeting Employee Satisfaction and “Perceived Organizational Support.” Perceived organizational support (POS) is defined as the employees’ “*beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being*” (Eisenberger et al., 1986, p. 501). Thus, it has become very important for the HR managers to analyses the needs and the expectations of the employees after rejoining the workforce, so as to maintain the same level of enthusiasm and efficiency amongst the employees.

The following research attempts to comprehend the revised set of employee expectations through a survey conducted in various 3-Star to 5-Star Hotel categories of Ahmedabad. Along with the Primary Data, Secondary data was also used as a methodology to analyze the needs of the employees. Various tourism and hotel sites were referred to gain a broader perspective of the current scenario. A future research can be carried out on the development of strategies that will help to meet the employee expectations and make it possible for the industry to overcome the reduced levels of productivity of the employees due to the pandemic.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted with a Basic research aim. The research aim was to comprehend the novel set of expectations that the employees possess after rejoining the workplace, in context to the Hotel industry, on account of COVID-19 Pandemic.

The study is exploratory in nature as it is conducted to understand the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the organizational commitment of the employees. A mixed approach was employed in terms of data collection. Primary data collection was done on the basis of Simple Random Sampling and secondary data was collected with the help of various hospitality sector websites and news articles. Given the nature of study, it was felt suitable to go for a qualitative stance of research, and in that the method of data collection was considered to be the Questionnaire Survey.

Keeping the current situation in mind, all the due safety precautions were taken while travelling in the city of Ahmedabad for data collection.

The questionnaire was administered physically at various 3-Star to 5-Star Hotel categories of Ahmedabad. The Questionnaire consisted of 2 open-ended Questions which aimed to examine the expectations of employees and the scope of improvement on the part of the management. Around 75 people from 9 different hotels were provided with the questionnaire. The job profile of the respondents included lower-management level of employees like the Front desk officer, HR personnel, Marketing personnel, Administrative personnel and IT personnel. An analysis of the Qualitative data was performed to deduce the inference.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Each participant was asked MCQ-type questions and open-ended questions in the paper questionnaire. A statistical analysis was conducted for the quantitative data received regarding the level of employee satisfaction post lockdown and the satisfaction level with reference to the pay that they receive. Following table indicates the results of the average level of satisfaction that has been computed for each hotel with varying number of participants.

Participant Hotel	Number of participants	Hotel Category	Average change in Employee Satisfaction level post Lockdown (out of 5)	Average level of Employee Satisfaction with regard to compensation (out of 5)
H1	2	3 Star hotel	3.5 (somewhat more satisfied)	4.5 (much more satisfied)
H2	3	3 Star hotel	3.7 (somewhat more satisfied)	2.3 (somewhat less satisfied)
H3	5	5 Star hotel	3.0 (same level of satisfaction)	2 (somewhat less satisfied)
H4	6	3 Star hotel	3.0 (same level of satisfaction)	3.0 (same level of satisfaction)
H5	8	4 Star hotel	3.88 (somewhat more satisfied)	3.75 (somewhat more satisfied)
H6	10	3 Star hotel	2.8 (somewhat less satisfied)	2.8 (somewhat less satisfied)
H7	11	5 Star hotel	2.82 (somewhat less satisfied)	4.27 (much more satisfied)
H8	15	3 Star hotel	2.87 (somewhat less satisfied)	2.73 (somewhat less satisfied)
H9	15	3 Star hotel	4 (somewhat more satisfied)	3.4 (somewhat more satisfied)
TOTAL	75	-	244	241

By computing the weighted average of the given data, it can be deduced that the average change (out of 5) in Employee Satisfaction level for all the participant hotels post Lockdown is approximately **3.25** (i.e., 244/75). The average level of Employee Satisfaction (out of 5) for all participant hotels with regard to compensation is approximately **3.21** (i.e., 241/75). Hence, from this data we can infer that overall, there has been a very little change in the Lower-Management Employee satisfaction level. On individual basis, it can be inferred that several factors have led to the decrease in the satisfaction level. However, these factors were also accompanied with a suggestion put forth by the employees which in turn could rectify the matter of concern and restore the productivity and the satisfaction levels of the employees. The following section focuses on the expectations of the employees of hotel industry that have rejoined the workplace amidst the pandemic and how those expectations could be met with a pragmatic approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Take safety measures to ensure well-being of employees

The basic expectation of any employee joining the workforce amidst the pandemic would be an assurance of their safety in the workplace. Employers have to take a key consideration regarding the safety measures against the pandemic, like practicing social distancing, sanitisation of workplace at regular intervals, provide PPE kits to the employees as well as the COVID-19 patients, if any. Providing health insurance to the employees against COVID-19 shall increase the Perceived organisational support of the employees.

2. Flexibility of work

The employees expect their supervisors to be less controlling and more supportive of their work. I believe that Decentralization of authority and Delegation of work shall ensure that there is a power balance in the hierarchy and the employees are not trapped under a rigid hierarchal structure. Employees shall have a voice in decisions pertaining to their scope of work.

3. Training opportunities

The employees look forward to acquiring a new set of skills that they can use in their daily work and get better results in return. The lockdown period was a great opportunity for the employers to upskill their employees through furnishing them with various digital courses and develop their soft skills through various webinars.

4. Team building & Recreational activities

Employees expect that the management shall protect their mental well-being and create an energetic working environment by providing few fringe benefits. I strongly recommend the organization to take this opportunity to develop a stronger bond among the employees by facilitating various ice-breaking and recreational activities that would pervade an air of high-spirits.

5. Feedback and Recognition of work

Employees have an urge to get their work recognized if they have expended considerable number of efforts over it. Thus, the employers shall boost the confidence of the employees by several means of performance appraisal and also provide feedback in order to improve the performance of the employees. In these difficult times of the pandemic, even a little push seems to have a really good impact on employee's performance.

6. Grievance redressal

Due to the difficulties faced in the time of the pandemic, employees might be going through certain hardships that need to be voiced out and addressed in the right manner. For this, there shall be a platform or a medium where the employee grievances are heard and addressed. HR shall have an authorized person/ counsellor to address these problems and act as a link between the management and the concerned employee.

7. Nepotism

Diminished productivity of employees will be one of major negative consequences of Nepotism in the organization. Employees look forward to working in an organization that is free from bias and prejudice and offers a safe working environment. Nepotism might also lead to inefficiency and counterproductive workplace behaviour of employees. Thus, the management shall ensure to keep the power politics in check.

8. Increase in salary and timely disbursement of salaries

To meet the unforeseen expenses on account of the COVID-19 circumstances, employees expect that their organization will support them financially through thick and thin. Management shall set aside a part of funds to help their employees with any exigency. This would increase the loyalty of the employees towards the organization and retain them for a longer period. The management shall also ensure timely disbursement of the salaries so that the employees feel secure with the cash in hand.

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 has been a menace to India and its economy. To break the chain of spreading virus, several phases of lockdown were imposed all over the country. All sectors of the business have met with a financial crisis. Amidst Covid-19, the hospitality industry has been facing massive loss due to no foreign arrivals and less demand and booking of hotel rooms. Numerous job losses and pay cuts have led to diminished Organizational Commitment of the employees. This study was an attempt to analyze the needs and expectations of the employees as it is now very pertinent for the HR managers to ensure that employees are able to regain the same level of loyalty towards the organization and work with the same levels of productivity and zeal. The study also recommends ways with which the set of employee expectations could be met.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Future research can be conducted with statistical methods to examine the levels of employee satisfaction and organizational commitment, along with diverse job profile and varying management levels of employees, after the latest phase of the Unlock Process. This will help to deduce the inference on quantitative basis along with the qualitative data furnished in this research paper.

In addition to that, Further Studies can be carried out, on the basis of this research paper, on the development of strategies that will reconcile the employee expectations with the organizational support, thereby making it possible for the industry to overcome the reduced levels of productivity on the part of the employees due to the pandemic.

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