

ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCE INFORMATION SYSTEMS IN IMPROVING TOURISM: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY OF SITUATION IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Management Insight
13(2) 40- 45
<https://doi.org/10.21844/mijia.v13i02.11267>

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ABSTRACT

Need for an efficient HR practice for smooth business operation requires no explanation in modern day business situation. Similar is the case with the tourism industry. Arunachal Pradesh has immense possibilities in tourism and hospitality industry because of its vivid scenic beauty, unique topography, picturesque landscape, and plenty of virgin natural resources. All of this requires a skilled, potent, and efficient workforce to deliver a memorable experience to tourists and visitors. A successful tourism business cannot be realised without a competent workforce who are directly responsible for rendering quality and memorable tour experience. Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) is known to enhance the competence of human resources and facilitating it by automation, objectivity, reliability, accuracy, and responsiveness. Through this article, efforts are laid to establish that for improving tourism in Arunachal Pradesh it is important to improve the current HR practices through an effective HRIS.

Keywords : HR Practices, Human Resource Management, Tourism Development, Human Resource Information System (HRIS), Arunachal Pradesh.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Tourism

Tourism means a temporary and short-term movement of people to destinations outside the places where they normally live and work, as well as their activities during their stay at these destinations. It should be noted that all tourism should have some travel, but not all travel is tourism. It comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for less than a year and whose main purpose of travel is other than the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited. Tourism stimulates economic growth by

generating income, employment, investment and exports. But it also generates valuable spin off benefits, including preservation of cultural heritage, improved infrastructure, and local community facilities (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2013). According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), tourism is “a social, cultural and economic phenomenon, which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. These people are called visitors (which may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non residents) and tourism has to do with their activities, some of

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which imply tourism expenditure”.

1.2 Human Resource Management (HRM)

The concept of Human Resource Management (HRM) emerged in the early 1980s and continues to evolve as a separate field of study. Extant literature suggests that Beer et al., 1985, Harvard University and Fombrun et al., 1984 Michigan University, contributed to the initial frameworks on HRM (Truss et al., 1997). According to Schneider and Bowen (1993) effective utilization of human resources provide a competitive edge for organizations (Chand and Katou, 2007). Thus, human resource management practices are an important component of the process of HRM and is important to investigate the adoption of human resource management practices in service industry. Service industry is mainly driven by efficiency and effectiveness of employees in organizations. Current HRM literature identifies significant and positive relationship between human resource management and organizational performance. Therefore, managing human resources in a service oriented organization is very important for achieving organizational goals and objectives. Tourism industry is necessarily labour intensive and this makes HRM practices particularly important and it should develop effective human resource practices and policies to achieve competitive success (Alleyne et al., 2006).

Research on HRM practices in the service sector are relatively few and the tourism and hospitality sector are a major segment of service industry (Collier and Gregory, 1995). According to Hoque (1999), hotel industry has typically reported poor practices and a lack of interest in HRM among managers. However, interest in HRM within the hotel industry has significantly increased over the years and heterogeneity in the service sector is identified as an obstacle to investigate the sector as whole (Hoque, 1999; Chand and Katou, 2007).

1.3 Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS)

HRIS is a purposeful blend of HRM and

information technology (IT). HRIS helps HR professionals perform their job roles more effectively (Broderick and Boudreau, 1992). The traditional ways of competitive advantage have to be supplemented with organizational capability, i.e., the firm's ability to manage people (Ulrich and Lake, 1990). Researchers have defined HRIS in different eras in different ways. HRIS has been defined as “a composite of database, computer applications, hardware and software necessary to collect/record, store, manage, deliver, present, and manipulate data for human resources” (Broderick and Boudreau, 1992). It has later been defined as a system used to acquire, store, manipulate, analyse, retrieve, and distribute resources (Kavanagh and Thite, 2009). It has been also defined as the primary transaction processor, editor, record-keeper, and functional application system which lies at the heart of all computerised human resources (HR) work (Grobler, 2005). HRIS grew in popularity in the 1960s (Nath and Satardekar, 2015) and by late 1990s almost 60% of the Fortune 500 companies were using HRIS to execute their HR management operations (Ball, 2001). HRIS has proved its mettle in varied areas of business - in the armed forces to agriculture; in corporate houses to government bodies; in IT companies to pharmaceutical companies, and the likes. HRIS in short, has been facilitating HR operations in almost every business concern. Tourism industry depends heavily on skilled human resources. It belongs to the service industry, and therefore, there cannot be any compromise with service delivery. HRIS provides an opportunity for HR to play a more strategic role, through their ability to generate metrics which can be used to support strategic decision-making (Lawler and Mohrman, 2003).

2. TOURISM IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Arunachal Pradesh is one of the most picturesque tourist destinations in India. Places of tourist attraction in the state can be broadly classified as:

- Places of religious importance and archaeological/historical sites.
- Wildlife sanctuaries and national parks.
- Adventure tourism.

- Traditional arts and craft, fairs & festivals, folk dance.

Although the state has countless beautiful attractions, flora and fauna to display, it fails to attract appreciable number of tourists partly because of insufficient infrastructure and poor promotion. To promote tourism of any destination one needs to employ aggressive promotion through variety of medium like advertisements/documentaries on satellite TV, columns in local and national dailies, magazines and the internet. The state has been unable to tap the potential of international media. As a result, the state has to depend on other local media to advertise the same and this has resulted in tourism not being able to attract foreign tourists which is evident from the fact that in the year 2012 foreign tourist contributed to only about 1.5% of the total tourist inflow in the state (Table 2.1). Arunachal Pradesh also lacks the infrastructural facilities of international standards. This important issue needs to be considered immediately and on a priority basis before going to promote it for improvement. Arunachal Pradesh received a grant of '131.96 crores for tourism development during the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, standing next only to Sikkim amongst the North-eastern states (LARRDIS, 2013).

Table 1. Number of tourist inflow in Arunachal Pradesh

Year	Foreign	Domestic	Total
2004-2005	354	0	354
2005-2006	292	3025	3317
2006-2007	1143	50612	51755
2007-2008	1939	31100	33039
2008-2009	3020	149292	152312
2009-2010	3945	195147	199092
2010-2011	3543	139829	143372
2011-2012	4753	237980	242733
2012-2013	5135	317243	322378
2013-2014	10846	125461	136307
2014-2015	5204	180964	186168
2015-2016	5283	326362	331645
Total	45457	1757015	1802472

Source : Directorate of Tourism, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, India.

There has been a persistent inconsistency so far, in the number of foreign and domestic visitors to the state. The situation is obvious from the data shown in Table 2.1. The problem is not of inadequate funds. There is the perennial problem of funds not reaching their intended recipients; in addition to the worrying gap between the conceptualization and actualization of the tourism policies of the North-eastern states (Neog, 2011). Moreover, another major issue with Arunachal's tourism industry are:

- a) Not much effort could be seen from the government agencies in tourism data collection for future data mining and information generation.
- b) Whatever little data they have, is stored in informal and very basic computer devices.
- c) Complete absence of a rigid database management system for ease of collection, storage, retrieval, and dissemination of information.

3. HRM FOR BETTER TOURISM

Tourist agency relies heavily on its employees. For that reason, and efficient recruitment and selection of effective candidates is very important. Recruitment is only the first step of process, which will remain unfinished if we do not take care on continuous training and education of personnel and especially on motivation (rewarding, performance validation, promotions, etc.). Tourism is under influence of rapid technology change which requires adjustments with work and knowledge, as well as of change in taste and demand of customers on the tourist market with a wide offer of unique products. Modern resource approach to employees emphasizes the need for organization to permanently improve personnel potentials. In tourism this has a specific value, because it is a business activity which is subject to rapid change, squeamish consumer taste and high dependence on information and modern communication technology. Improvement of employees is in direct relationship with organization flexibility, and flexibility is required for an agency to survive in the market. Improvements help to motivate

employees, to identify their potentials and direct them towards company goals. Global study also gives an indication of future education and training priorities for tourism.

Spivack (1997) reported a number of what she called “skills development issues” derived from anticipated changes within the tourism sector, and which the panel consensus process prioritized as central to education and training needs in the future. These were, in rank order:

1. Managers will need to develop more skills in human resource management, particularly in knowing how to build an enthusiastic workforce.
2. With continued internationalization of business, all levels of management will need more training, especially in interpersonal and multicultural skills.
3. Environmental awareness and conservation techniques will become an essential part of tourism education at all levels.
4. The expansion of franchises among transnational firms will accelerate the need for international- level quality of service and skill standards.
5. Public health issues, such as AIDS, that relate to the delivery of tourist products and services will become an essential part of tourism education at all levels.
6. Supervisors will need to learn more high-level management skills such as forecasting and strategic planning.

4. HRIS FOR BETTER HRM

HRIS has been instrumental in managing the daunting task of managing human resources in all the sectors of business. It facilitates operations in all the relevant HR management aspects such as recruitment and selection, training and development, compensation management, time and cost savings, HR planning, conflict management, etc. As tourism depends heavily on potent and effective human resources to deliver service, inclusion of HRIS into the process will only enhance the level significantly. Apart from that, HRIS facilitates organizational adherence to the government regulations (Mirani and Lederer,

1998). This is another very important issue which concerns tourism industry. HRIS can enhance employee productivity and business efficiency. This fact was revealed through different studies conducted worldwide by King and Schrems (1978), McGugan (1987), Rivard and Kaiser (1989), Smith (1983), and Sullivan-Trainor (1990). Parker and Benson (1987) had long time back established the fact that HRIS can help disseminate better service to customers. HRIS is capable of improving customer relations (Orli and Tom, 1987; Rivard and Kaiser, 1989). High standards of customer relations are indispensable and should be maintained for tourism management. And moreover, HRIS will ensure the operations during tourism management are aligned to the set objectives.

All of this discussion confirms the utility, potential, and significance of HRIS for a promising tourism industry in the state.

5. CONCLUSION

From this study, it is concluded that presently skilled, efficient, and motivated workforce are the prime requirements in the state of Arunachal Pradesh to improve tourism situation. In order to bring about that improvement, reformed HR practice is desirable. As the tourism industry relies predominantly on its workforce for quality in delivery, it is inevitable that we have some tools which can facilitate upgradation of the existing workforce, and selection of suitable people thereafter. HRIS is already a tried and tested platform in HR management, and therefore, it is the most deserving tool to meet the exact requirements for improving tourism situation in the state. As tourism sector in Arunachal Pradesh is almost wholly looked after by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, it is desirable that the office considers implementation of an appropriate HRIS which suits their particular requirements and improve the situation through it. From this study it was observed that improvement in tourism industry in the state can be brought about most convincingly by improving the existing HR practices, which in turn can be

most effectively done through HRIS. So, HRIS is the catalyst which can boost tourism in the state by having direct impact on the HR management practices in the industry. Although it is well understood that adoption and effective implementation of a formal HRIS is not free from challenges. In several instances, the expected benefits of HRIS were not actually achieved the intended way (Loveman, 1994). Small and medium enterprises find it tough to realize full-scale benefits of an HRIS (David et al., 2015; Ferdous, 2015b).

Lack of knowledge of the HR Department and less focus on the HR Department (Krishna and Singh, 2006) and lack of technical expertise, untrained staff, and financial constraints (Batoool et al., 2012) are the main barriers to implementation of HRIS in the Indian context. This study identified similar problems with tourism sector in the state. Therefore, the Government of Arunachal Pradesh would need to identify these issues and address them before acquiring HRIS and attempting to implement it.

But at the same time, the agencies concerned with tourism development in the state should not be bogged down looking at these impediments, because there are several success stories of HRIS in tourism development and hospitality management like that of Taj Hotel, Mumbai and Club Mahindra, who have successfully made use of HRIS to the best of their advantage and created a precedence for others to refer and follow.

It appears like a triangular structure, where HR management has a direct influence on the tourism sector, and at the same time, HRIS has a concrete impact on HR management. Consequently, it is established that HRIS will have a direct role in improving the huge tourism potential in the serene state of Arunachal Pradesh.

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