



Implementation of employee cross-training during perilous conditions in hotels



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 December 2016

Received in revised form 27 April 2017

Accepted 13 May 2017

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Cross-training

Egypt

Job performance

Employee retention

Service quality

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to (1) scrutinize the extent of implementing cross-training in 5-star chain hotels, (2) identify the relevant factors that should be considered to maximize the cross-training benefits, and (3) investigate its effect on hotels' organizational performance. The population of this research comprises employees in all five-star chain hotels in Egypt; 113 hotels. Results revealed that it is very principal for hotel department staff to be cross-trained in different departments or within the various functions within the department. Results also showed that an effective cross training technique can result in better job performance, employee retention and service quality.

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1. Introduction

Most hotels in Egypt are suffering from perilous -conditions after the Egyptian revolution in 25th of January 2011 and the subsequent political and economic instability. Number of tourists has significantly declined down from 14.7 million in 2010 to 9.8 million in 2011. Moreover, Tourism in Egypt has been struggling since Russia, along with other countries including the UK, suspended passenger flights to Egypt in late 2015 due to security concerns following the deadly crash of a Russian jet over the peninsula of Sinai on 31 October of that year. Consequently, numbers of tourists have decreased to 9.1 million in 2015 (En.wikipedia, 2016). These changes have affected the hotel workforce. Accordingly, hotels management should adopt suitable plans and policies to better utilize their employees' capabilities and time.

Employees should be provided with equal opportunities for attending the training courses that improve their skills, see Al-Mzary, Al-rifai, and Al-Momany (2015). Employees' Cross-Training (ECT) is essentially needed to solve many problems in many of the current organizations (Bokhorst, 2011; Olivella & Nembhard, 2016). In particular, ECT is very valuable in service organizations with large workforce (Sila, 2014). By adopting ECT, organizations can decrease the required number of employees for production or service (Danielson, 2000). Additionally, ECT helps organizations avoid the loss of an employee due to any reasons. Consequently, it keeps organization from decreased productivity, lost revenue, and bad customer relations. This means that ECT contributes

in promoting teamwork inside organizations to achieve the operational readiness (Maturi, 2013). In general, training- is considered as a type of investment that will bring high return to organizations in the future and will also support it to achieve competitive advantage (Ramya, 2016). Accordingly, cross-trained employees are more valuable for organizations than specialized employees (Pinker & Shumsky, 2000). Many factors should be well considered before implementing ECT such as its cost, objectives, expected benefits, expected reactions of employees and the level of training, whether inter-departmental or within a specific area. Therefore, proper planning of ECT will help attain the maximum benefits and avoid any opposite effect (Abrams & Berge, 2010; Slomp & Molleman, 2002).

Although cross training is vital, training employees to acquire a lot of tasks may lead to their dissatisfaction and reduced performance (Dunphy & Bryant, 1996). If this is the case, then employees should not be cross-trained in several unneeded tasks. They should be just cross-trained through specific predetermined tasks (Brusco & Johns, 1998; Slomp & Molleman, 2002). ECT may thus be implemented for some or all employees, regarding some or several tasks (Olivella, Corominas, & Pastor, 2013). Therefore, it is essential to implement ECT in the most efficient way that meets and suits the needs, time and changes of an organization (Jordan, Inman, & Blumenfeld, 2004). Moreover, since organizations differ concerning their needs and operational circumstances, there is no unified ECT approach that can be adapted to all organizations. Organizations have different priorities as to which task and departments in which to implement ECT (Abrams & Berge, 2010; Easton & Brethen, 2014).

Several studies have studied the impact of ECT on other organizational variables. For examples, Morgan (2014) studied the impact of

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ECT on performance. [Chen and Tseng \(2012\)](#) also studied the impact of ECT on service quality, employee retention, job satisfaction, higher payment, promotion and job performance. In the current study, researchers focus on the impact of ECT on job performance, employee retention and service quality as being chief indicators for hotels' success and competitiveness. Accordingly, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which ECT is applied in five-star hotels in Egypt, and to determine the effect of the current level of implementation of ECT on the organizational performance of the hotel operations, measured in terms of job performance, employee retention and service quality.

2. Conceptual background and hypotheses

2.1. Definition and importance of employee cross training

ECT is a strategy in which an employee is trained to get knowledge about the tasks, duties and functions of other employees in his organization ([Abrams & Berge, 2010](#); [Volpe, Cannon-Bowers, Salas, & Spector, 1996](#)). It was also defined as an instructional technique to increase an employee's knowledge and experience by providing him with guidelines and skills to do others' work ([Salas, Nichols, & Driskell, 2007](#)). ECT is the employee's multi-functionality which refers to the possession of many skills that enable him to do more than one task or job ([Ahmad & Schroeder, 2003](#); [Huang, Kristal, & Schroeder, 2010](#)). Thus, the basis for ECT is to facilitate any employee to help or to replace other employee who is not able to achieve the expected tasks ([Starr, 2009](#)). Moreover, ECT is one of the main sources to provide flexible workforce to raise productivity and provide a permanent service ([Hallgren & Olhager, 2009](#)). In addition, ECT helps broaden employees' skills in order to be ready to carry out tasks in the unexpected – perilous conditions ([Abrams & Berge, 2010](#)). ECT is also used to minimize the negative consequences of unplanned employee absence ([Chen & Wallace, 2011](#); [Inman, Jordan, & Blumenfeld, 2004](#); [Slomp & Molleman, 2002](#); [Slomp & Suresh, 2005](#)). Furthermore, ECT is a vital strategy and very cost-effective technique that enables hotels to adopt with the continual discrepancies in the demand for seasonal employees ([Baum, 2006](#)). Recently, [Olivella and Nembhard \(2016\)](#) confirmed that employees should have a suitable skill matrix to meet demand variation and other employees' absence. Overall, management should depend on ECT to provide high quality service- that is streamlined and minimizes customer waiting ([Whiting, & Donthu, N. and Baker, A., 2011](#)).

Moreover, ECT is an appropriate tool to avoid the employees' boredom which may result from doing the same tasks every day without any changes, and provide them with opportunities to do other tasks than their routine ones ([Ojambati, Akinbile, & Abiola-Falemu, 2012](#)). Due to the importance of ECT, it should be carefully included in hotels' approaches to boost job performance and service quality. It should involve both supervisory level and entry-level positions. "Housekeeping should cross-train in Front Office and vice-versa; Front Office in Marketing, Sales, Public Relations, Food & Beverage, Banquets, Security; Marketing & Sales in Front Office, Food & Beverage, Purchasing; Food & Beverage Service in the Culinary department and vice versa; Human Resources in different departments and vice versa" ([Belilos, 1999](#)).

In general, ECT supports hospitality operations to deal with problematic environmental changes and the perilous conditions. It should be adopted by many hotels to enhance the skills of employees and qualify them for supervisory positions. In fact, all members of the organization whether employees, managers or customers can benefit from implementing ECT ([Nicolaidis, 2013](#)). In sum, [Chen and Tseng \(2012\)](#) summarized the following benefits of ECT:

- Minimizing relevant efforts and costs of dealing with cases of sudden employees' vacancies or absences.
- Increasing the understanding of the roles and responsibilities of others member in organization, which can help resolve guests' problems and needs immediately.

- Increasing employees' satisfaction by decreasing their boredom and improving their experience and skills.

2.2. Types of employee cross training

[Cannon-Bowers, Salas, Blickensderfer, and Bowers \(1998\)](#) have defined three types of ECT: positional clarification, positional modeling, and positional (job) rotation. *Positional clarification* involves orally providing employees with information about their colleagues' tasks, either through lecture or a manual. *Positional modeling* is a kind of practical training that encourages organization members to learn through allowing an employee to practice on others' roles, mainly by observing their performance. Employees' behaviors are expected to emulate what they have acquired through watching expert teams successfully performing a task. *Positional (job) rotation* gives each employee the opportunity to get the experience of doing others' tasks through actual participation in each task. This method involves *hands-on training* of an employee for a specific period on other employees' roles.

[Cannon-Bowers et al. \(1998\)](#) stated that there are important differences among the three methods of ECT. They noted that positional rotation requires more time and cost. Moreover, [Cooke et al. \(2003\)](#) rotational ECT represents full training, and it is an actual practical training on other members' tasks of the organization, thus, they indicated that the rotational style of ECT is more task-oriented as employees have a real practical experience and knowledge. In contrast, [Cooke et al. \(2003\)](#) stated that clarification is a simple style of ECT. This style focuses more on training employee to know the roles of other members in the organization rather than how to perform the actual tasks necessary for that roles. In general, [Irvani, Van Oyen, and Sims \(2005\)](#) indicated that capacity balancing and variability buffering are two main features of an effective ECT. *Capacity balancing* means that ECT enables employees to allocate their effort among stations in the line to improve their use. *Variability buffering* means that ECT can improve the organization performance, not only through capacity balancing, but also by diminishing the negative impact of changeability in the line.

2.3. Employee cross training and job performance

The objective of any organization is to develop and maintain good job performance levels ([Gavrea, Ilieș, & Stegorean, 2011](#)). ECT is required to improve the overall job performance (JP) under the pressure of work load ([Davis, Kher, & Wagner, 2009](#)). The knowledge and skills that are gained from training lead to the development of an employee's JP ([Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000](#)). Moreover, a cross trained employee will be well prepared for his/her future career ([Olivella et al., 2013](#)). Thus, [Chen \(2010\)](#) assumed that implementation of ECT has an optimistic and direct effect on employees' job satisfaction. Employees who are able to get more knowledge and skills through ECT can achieve variable tasks and demonstrate positive satisfaction toward their job ([Sila, 2014](#); [Zumrah, Boyle, & Fein, 2013](#)). Accordingly, organizations should keep a part of the employees' time to increase their skills to improve its JP during perilous conditions ([Bokhorst, 2011](#); [Sila, 2014](#)).

Moreover, [Ahmad and Schroeder \(2003\)](#) found that ECT has an indirect effect on JP through its effect on organizational commitment and citizenship behaviors. In this context, employees can adopt "Altruism", which is the optional behavior of helping their colleagues complete a job-related task ([Organ, 1997](#); [Werner, 2007](#)). Employees who have these behaviors usually aim at helping their colleagues with work-related problem by providing them with the required information to do a task or assisting them in completing their work ([Chiboiwa, Chipunza, & Samuel, 2011](#)). Employee can also adopt "Conscientiousness", that is another optional behavior, through which they exceed their job description ([Tayyab, 2005](#)). Conscientiousness involves behaviors such as arriving at work on time, working late on a big task, using time intelligently and efficiently while at work, and using the organization's

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