

# Issues in Human Resource Management Practice in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry in Nigeria

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## **Abstract**

*Tourism and hospitality is a vast industry in Nigeria with a large workforce. This industry which began on a modern note early in the twentieth century has now mushroomed into a diverse range of subsectors and occupations. These include hospitality services, travel services, tourist services, consultancy, visitor attraction, holiday parks, gambling, events, youth hostels among others. Although there is a diversity of employment within the industry in Nigeria, as elsewhere in the world, most of them belong to the unskilled and semi-skilled labour with a near absence of professionalism. The nature of the industry in Nigeria and the characteristics of the workforce show generally that the industry is bedeviled with a number of human resource issues that bother mainly on poor personnel practices. This paper examines these issues so as to guide the organizations and managers in the industry as they recruit, develop and maintain a committed, competent and well-motivated workforce that will move the industry forward and subsequently contribute to the nation's economic growth.*

## **Introduction**

The tourism and hospitality industry is considered as one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world. Compared to other industries which have witnessed several fluctuations and frequent sharp declines, the industry has rarely fallen into serious long-term down-turn (Hawkins, 1993:176), thus making it one of the world's most dependable revenue earners (Ekechukwu, 2002:1). Worldwide, the industry generates an estimated four trillion dollars annually (Awake, 2005). The World Travel and Tourism Council suggest that travel and tourism-related activities (including hospitality) account for over 230 million jobs or 8.7 percent of jobs worldwide (WTTC, 2006 in Nickson 2007). Thus, Awake Magazine (2005:3) reflecting the nature of the industry and its employment potential notes that:

Each year over 600 million people travel internationally, hundreds of millions more journey

within their home country, doing so for both work and pleasure. As a result, the tourism industry including hotels, resorts, airlines, travel agencies, and other businesses that cater to travelers is described as 'the world's number one employer'.

Although the industry has a huge diversity in terms of the range of sub-sectors and types of jobs it generates, nevertheless it is heterogeneous in terms of the predominance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). As a result of the heterogeneity within the industry, different organizations or sub-sectors adopt different approaches to human resource management in order to gain competitive advantage. Some of these approaches have generated human Resources problems in the industry. In Nigeria, for example, the industry has witnessed poor employment policies and practices ranging from the massive deployment of unskilled labour, generally low wages, poor or non-existent career structure to disparity in the rates of payment between indigenous and expatriate staff in some international hotel chains. These poor employment practices have often resulted in high labour turn-over. This paper attempt to encourage the use of the "best practice" approach to human resource management in the industry to enable organizations and managers, recruit, develop and maintain a committed, competent and well-motivated workforce for effective and qualitative service-delivery.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

**Human Resource Management:** Every business or organization is carried out or managed by the proficiency of the resources as outputs. These resources are processed into output as products or services by the mechanism of operation. These resources include men, materials, money, machine and information technology (Uba, P.A. 2009). According to McDons (2006:83) in Uba, (2009) resources of business are the various inputs both technical and manpower required to transform into output for sale for continuity of the business. McDons observed that the most important of these resources is the man, which is often referred to as the human capital. Job (2004:86), observed that the human capital (resource) is the bedrock of every factory work. According to Peter (2008:99) development of human capital is very vital to the growth of any enterprise. He maintained that the move to expand productive and service base, the production of quality products, rendering of excellent service, the cherished 'congenial relationship between labour, management, and government, fund procurement and articulate use as

well as excellent adaptation of the current technological challenges are well motivated and done by the worker. Tomson (2006:325) has noted that human beings are the most difficult to manage of all the resources of an organization. According to Anioke (2004:36), it is the human resource that gives discretion to the functioning of other resources and combines them in the required proportion for a better output. He maintained that the human resource is the most important resource and the most volatile.

In view of the above assertion and in line with the view of Aliche (2008:289), human resource management is all that an organization or business needs to grow to any length and size. Its mismanagement to the contrary, could lead to eventual folding of the organization. Nickson, (2007), recognizes Human Resource Management as being broadly about how organizations seek to manage their employees in the pursuit of organizational success. He thus defined Human Resource Management as "a distinctive approach to employment management which seeks to achieve competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce, using an integrated array of cultural, structural and personnel techniques. To Nickson, the challenge of Human Resource Management then would seem to be how to recruit, deploy, develop reward and motivate staff, leading to them being a source of competitive advantage. Alugbuo (2013), defines Human Resource Management as the process or the art of managing people at work, so that they can be effective and efficient in the production of goods and services. He sees it as the strategic acquisition, placement and treatment of people in such a way that it would lead to the optimum growth and viability of the organization.

### **Tourism and Hospitality Management**

Nickson, (2007) has noted the inherent problems in seeking to define the tourism and hospitality industry since many of the activities within the industry may overlap. For example Lucas (2004) in Nickson (2007) in her recent work on employment relations in the hospitality and tourism industry chose to talk in broad terms about the Hotel, Catering and Tourism Sector (HCTS). This characterization of the HCTS recognizes that, in reality many jobs in hospitality and tourism share common attributes with both hospitality and tourism activities, thus recognizing the potential for a lack of precision in describing the tourism and hospitality industry (Nickson, 2007:3).

Many scholars and researchers have treated tourism and hospitality as separate industries with their respective sectors and sub-sectors. Others however attempt to subsume one under the other. For

example, Holloway (2006:270) considers hospitality as a sector of the tourism industry that consists of accommodation and catering services. Mancini (2005) sees it as a distinct industry that encompasses the lodging and food services industries. Walker (2006) on his part considers tourism and hospitality as an industry with several sectors and sub-sectors. Okpoko and Okpoko (2002) assume that hospitality is a subset of the tourism industry. They defined the tourism industry as those businesses and organizations that provide facilities and services that cater for the needs of tourists *from* the time of their arrival to and their departure from their destinations". They listed such facilities provided as transportation, catering and accommodation, recreational facilities and relevant information.

As pointed out above, there is lack of precision in defining and describing the tourism and hospitality industry. However, a number of scholars have attempted to suggest the number of sectors or sub-sectors that make up the industry. People 1st (2006) has suggested that the industry as a whole is made up of 14 sub-sectors, namely: hotels, restaurants, pubs, bars and night-clubs, membership clubs, events, gambling, travel services, tourist services, visitor attractions, youth hostels, holiday parks, self-catering accommodation and hospitality services.

It is noted that within this broad classification of travel, tourism and hospitality, there is massive diversity in the types of jobs generated (Dennis Nickson, 2007). Indeed, there is a problem in classifying the boundaries of the tourism industry" because of the inter-relatedness of the sectors which form part of the whole (Anyanwu et al, nd) in Ukabuilu (2007:4). However, Ward *et al* (1996:6) recognize the following as the most important sectors of the industry.

- (a) Transport (Land, Air, Water);
  - (b) Accommodation and Catering establishments (hotels, restaurants, motels, inns, etc);
  - (c) Tour operators and Travel Agents;
  - (d) Attractions and Events;
  - (e) Services (Financial institutions, tourism information);
  - (f) Tour organizations (National, regional and International);
  - (g) Tourism bodies e.g. World Tourism Organization (WTO).
- (Source: Anyanwu, Adebayo and Nwachukwu, nd: 18). Walker, J.R. (2006) outlined the scope of the tourism and hospitality industry as comprising the following sectors and sub-sectors;
- (a) Travel - air, cruise ships, rail, coach automobile, ecotourism;
  - (b) Lodging-hotels, motels, resorts;

- (c) Assembly and Event Management meetings, conventions, Expositions
- (d) Restaurants and Managed services-restaurants, managed services;
- (e) Recreation-attractions, gaming, parks, recreation.

Managed services entail food service operations in health care facilities such as hospitals, airlines (in-flight and terminal), military, college and universities and elementary and secondary schools. These sectors and sub-sectors have their career paths and therefore serve as employment generators.

### **Workforce and Occupations within the Tourism and Hospitality Industry**

The tourism and hospitality industry world-wide is said to be highly heterogeneous because of the large number of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) that belong to it. Research has shown that within the U.K. hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism sector, 76 percent of establishment employ fewer than ten people and 50 per cent fewer than five (Nickson, D. 2007). The situation may not be different in Nigeria where some hospitality services, travel and tourism outfits, fast-food restaurants, bars, car rental services may employ less than five workers. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2001) in their report on the global tourism and hospitality industry provides evidence that suggests that the industry globally relies on a workforce predominated by women, young workers, casual employees, students and migrant workers. Within the U.K. for example, women make up around 58 percent of the broader hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism workforce (People 1st, 2006). According to him, within the hospitality sub-sector in the U.K., a large proportion of the workforce is made up of part-time employees and young people below the ages of 24 years and under 34 years. Most of these young people are students, seasonal and migrant workers. The restaurant sub-sector employs over 12 million people in 878,000 locations and continues to grow (Walker, 2006:43). In the United States, about 230,000 recreation workers are employed and in comparison to other jobs, the field of recreation has a very high number of part-time, seasonal and volunteer jobs (Walker, 2006: 63). The amusement and theme parks provide a wide variety of jobs to employees. It is estimated that the sub-sector employs over 350,000 workers in many areas of work and some serve as designer, artists, inspectors and repairers and scientists (See Walker 2006:65).

In Nigeria, the labour market for tourism and hospitality is dominated by men, women and young people. A reasonable proportion

of the young people that work in these establishments may be students of tertiary educational institutions, especially if such educational institutions are situated in the cities where these tourism and hospitality establishments are located. In such situation, the student employees work mainly on night shifts and go for their lectures during the day. Some may be casual workers who usually take up such employment during the holidays (long vacation). The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2001) has also reported that students are an increasingly important segment of the labour market for hospitality and tourism organizations. This is because they are prepared to accept low wages and tend to be flexible in their working patterns (Canny 2002 in Nickson 2007). In Nigeria, student-employees can be engaged as front-office staff, *waiters/waitresses* in restaurants, swimming pool attendants, bar attendants, security personnel, concierges, cleaners, laundry attendants ticketing/reservation clerks in travel agencies and coach companies couriers, car rental sales agents, casino machine operators and so on. The travel and tourism sub-sector in Nigeria comprising coach (bus) operators, car rental services, travel agencies, tourism operating agencies and the airlines, has a large workforce. The coach (bus) operators for example, employ both male and female workers. The men serve mainly as drivers, security officers, conductors, mechanics, loaders, ticketing reservation officers. The female mainly serve as ticketing/reservation officers, cooks and stewards in the terminal restaurants, shop and bar attendants and cleaners. Indigenous and foreign airlines operating in Nigeria are also important employers of labour. The workforces are engaged in both ground and flight operations. For instance, they serve as aircraft engineers, pilots, air hostesses, booking/ticketing officers, marketing officers and so on. Like their counterparts in the coach (bus) operating service who belong to the Nation Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), indigenous airline workers belong to various trade unions in the aviation sector.

Visitor attractions in Nigeria such as wildlife and amusement parks, museums and art galleries, also have a fairly large workforce comprising male and female employees. The national museums in Nigeria, for example, have staff strength of about 2,800 workers, made up of senior and junior staff that belongs to the professional technical and administrative categories. The commercial hospitality sub- sector in Nigeria, comprising hotels, motels, restaurants beer palours/bars, night clubs also has a large workforce made up of men, women and young people. The sub-sector in Nigeria as elsewhere in the world, presents a lot of career opportunities. For example, in the restaurant departments of

these hotels, motels and commercial restaurants outfits, people can be employed as managers, supervisors, stewards and cleaners. Similarly, in the kitchen department people can be engaged as executive chef, section chef, kitchen supervisor, cooks and so on. In the house keeping department, people can be engaged as executive housekeepers, senior house keepers, floor housekeepers, and floor supervisors. As a matter of fact, it has been argued that hotels and related hospitality outfits constitute more than 65 percent of all employment generated in tourism (Awoseyin, 2011) and this situation cannot be different for Nigeria. In the National Parks and Game Reserves such as Yankari Game Reserve in Bauchi State, and Kainji Lake National Park in Niger State, people can be employed as tourism officers and attain such positions as General Manager, Assistant General Manager and Senior Manager (Tourism), respectively. People can also be employed in educational consultancy in tourism, tourism administration such as the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC) or other areas of private entrepreneurship in tourism and hospitality.

### **Models and Approaches to Human Resource Management and Their Applicability to the Tourism and Hospitality Industry**

A number of human resource management models and approaches have been developed through time. One of the earliest of these approaches was offered by Storey (1987) in what he called the "hard and soft" Human Resource Management. According to Storey, the hard version is seen as instrumentally and economically rational approach to Human Resource Management. In this version, people management strategies are driven by strategic considerations that enable the company or firm gain competitive advantage, maximize control and result in very low labour costs. The soft version, on the other hand, adopts a more humanistic and developmental posture to Human Resources Management. In this regard the organization's people management approach is rather more consensual and based on a high level of managerial commitment to employees. This is intended to provoke a high level of commitment and trust from employees and help generate a high level of productivity. In the soft version, employees are seen as proactive, capable of being developed and worthy of trust and collaboration" (Storey 1987 in Nickson, 2007). Storey's Hard and Soft human resource management is simply pointing to the manner in which organizations can vary their approaches to human resource management and the corresponding impact of these on employees. Boxall and Purcell

(2000) and other scholars have also made another attempt to understand the way organizations approach the management of their human resource. This is viewed in terms of whether organizations should aim to achieve “best fit or best practice”. The debate on best fit and best practice has given rise to two schools of thought. While the “best fit” school argues in favour of an approach to human resource management that is fully integrated with the specific organizational and environmental context in which the organization operates, the best practice school, argues for a universal approach to human resource management. In the best practice approach, there is a belief that all firms that adopt a range of agreed human resource policies and practices are more likely to create a workforce that has high commitment and performance on the job (Boxall and Purcell 2000 in Nickson 2007). They argue that through this approach, firms and organizations will realize enhanced commitment from their employees’ organizational performance, higher levels of increased productivity and profitability. In a nutshell, best practice will enhance the skills of employees and activities like selective staffing, comprehensive training and development (Redman *et al* 1998 in Nickson, 2007). Selective staff entails recruiting and selecting staff through a range of assessment process that will help to evaluate their personality, work values, interpersonal skills and their capacity to participate effectively in problem-solving activities. Training and development will equip the junior and intermediate staff with team working and interpersonal skills to help develop their service orientation. For the manager, it will help develop new leadership style that will lead to mentoring and coaching style of managing people at work. The best practice approach, according to the proponents, will also encourage employee empowerment and performance-based incentives which seek to reward employees for high quality performance on the job. This paper adopts the “best practice” approach to human resource management in the tourism and hospitality industry in Nigeria based on a number of reasons that will be highlighted later.

### **Issues and Perceptions of Human Resource Practices in Tourism and Hospitality Industry**

The tourism and hospitality industry is said to have often struggled with negative perceptions about employment practices and conditions and these perceptions have often been matched by the reality (Nickson 2007). Many scholars and researchers have characterized tourism and hospitality employment as generally unrewarding and unappealing. Douglas Coupland (1993:5 in Nickson, 2007) considers



employment in the industry as a low-pay, low-prestige, low-dignity, low-benefit, no future-job in the service sector and frequently considered a satisfying career choice by people who have never held one". MacDonald and Sirianni (1996 in Nickson, D. 2007) also "recognize the challenges of living and working in a service society [tourism and hospitality] which, according to them, is characterized by two kinds of service jobs; large numbers of low-skill, low-pay jobs and a smaller number of high-skill, high-income jobs, with few jobs being in the middle of these two extremes. A number of scholars and researchers have alluded to the reality of poor employment practices in the tourism and hospitality industry. In their review of the skills issue in the tourism and hospitality industry, Keep and Mayhew (1999) suggest that the industry has a number of personnel problems, including:

- Generally low wages, unless skill shortages act to counter this (e.g. Chefs);
- Unsocial hours and shift patterns that are not family friendly;
- Over representation of women and ethnic minorities in low level operative positions, with better paid, higher status and more skilled jobs filled by men, pointing to undeveloped equal opportunities policies in the sector;
- Poor or non-existent career structures and use of casualized seasonal employment;
- Over reliance on informal recruitment methods;
- Lack of evidence of good practice personnel/HRM practice;
- Little or no trade union presence;
- High levels of labour turnover; and
- Difficulties in recruitment and retention of employees (Nickson, 2007).

By recognizing the reality of poor employment practices, Riley *et al* (2000 in Nickson 2007) argue that labour economic imperative is the key determining factor for Human Resource Management policies and practices in tourism and hospitality. This economic imperative creates a short-term perspective on managerial decision-making and strategy in relation to Human Resource Management (Nickson, D 2007) and usually leads management to resort to weak internal labour market. The result of this is that Human Resource Management concerns in tourism and hospitality organizations are directed to short-term issues like recruitment, selection, basic training to the utter neglect of long-term areas that could offer more development and career progression for the existing workers. A number of factors are, therefore, recognized as being responsible for poor personnel practices in the tourism and hospitality

industry. These include the preponderance of SMEs, abundance of low-skilled labour, poor attitude of managers to long-term career development and progression of workers, employer apathy to a route to competitive advantage that recognizes high-skills, high-wages and high service quality and dependence on prevailing economic situation.

Employment policies and practices in tourism and hospitality industry as highlighted above, follow similar pattern in Nigeria. For example, majority of the workforce do not possess the requisite qualifications for the jobs they do. Only a negligible proportion of the workforce has bachelor's degrees or diplomas in tourism and hospitality. In most tourism and hospitality organizations in the country, the graduate employees come from disciplines such as marketing, accountancy, political science, food science and technology, nutrition and dietetics. The dearth of graduate manpower with qualifications in tourism and hospitality could be traced to the relatively recent arrival of the discipline in the educational scene in the country and the reluctance of government to accord priority to tourism and hospitality education in the country. The problem of recruiting and retaining high-skills and high wage indigenous staff by most of the international hotel chains in the country is very glaring. In majority of these up-scale hotel establishments, most of the top management positions are occupied by expatriate staff with Nigerians serving mainly in middle-level positions. This disparity in both position and pay usually generates a lot of ill-feeling that often leads to a high turnover of indigenous staff, especially those who may feel marginalized by management. In some cases, the indigenous staff, may even be more qualified and experienced than their foreign counterparts. Another human resource management issue within the tourism and hospitality industry in Nigeria is the little or no trade union presence in most of the organizations and firms. As a result of the absence or near absence of trade unions, following the low size of the workforce, most employers are usually unwilling to offer competitive pay and good conditions of employment.

### **Panacea for Poor Human Resource Practices in Tourism and Hospitality Industry in Nigeria**

In order to attract, maintain and develop a workforce that will enhance service delivery and therefore promote efficiency and profitability within the industry in Nigeria, a number of suggestions are proffered by this paper. One, the recruitment and selection of staff must lay emphasis on the need for such employees to have an aptitude for customer care. Two, the use of extensive induction and re-training

programmes must be considered a matter of priority by managers and organizations within the industry. Such programmes will help to reduce the level of staff turnover since such training could give them a sense of belonging and empowerment. Organizations and firms within the industry can liaise with training institutions in the country such as National Institute for Hospitality and Tourism (NIHOTOUR), Polytechnics and Universities for such training programmes. This brings to the fore the urgent need for the introduction of tourism and hospitality education into our secondary and tertiary curriculum. The introduction of tourism and hospitality education even at the secondary level of our educational system will help prepare and equip the youths with the skills needed to take up such jobs in the industry. Another important human resource issue that must be tackled is the discriminating attitude towards indigenous staff by owners of international hotel chains in the country, especially in matters relating to appointment, promotion and equitable pay. Government must ensure that indigenous staff are given equal opportunities with their expatriate counterparts to ensure equity in the industry. The ministry of labour and productivity must ensure that employers in the industry do not short change their employees by paying them non-living wages and by providing them poor working environment. Again the ministry should endeavour to set up workers consultative committees in tourism and hospitality organizations and firms employing upwards of 50 workers so as to give the workers a voice in matters concerning their welfare and in the running of the organization. The industry should encourage merit-based remuneration and the use of internal labour market that advocates promotion from within instead of sourcing for labour from outside, a situation that may breed discontent among the workers. To build a committed and competent workforce that will encourage excellent service delivery, this paper, therefore, encourages the adoption of the "best practice" approach to human resource management by the tourism and hospitality industry in Nigeria. This is premised on the following reasons. First, it will encourage team-work and help to develop interpersonal skills that could enhance commitment that could result to high service quality. High service quality will eventually translate to increased productivity and profitability for the organization. Second, it will encourage staff involvement, ensure job security and reduce the level of staff turnover, since the staff are given a sense of belonging. Above all, it will encourage payment systems that reward hard work and high commitment to the job so that staff that possesses such qualities will see the industry as an exciting place to work.

## Conclusion

This paper has dwelt on human resource management in the tourism and hospitality industry with particular reference to Nigeria. It has recognized the place of tourism and hospitality as an important employment generator.

The paper recognized the fact that although the industry provides a huge diversity in terms of the range of sub-sectors and types of jobs it generates, it is heterogeneous in terms of the predominance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). This heterogeneity often leads some organizations and firms in the industry to adopt different approaches to human resource management. Some of these approaches lead to poor employment policies and practice that often generate human resource problems. The paper advocates the use of some models that could help recruit, develop and maintain a committed, competent and well-remunerated workforce that will ensure a high level of productivity and profitability for the industry.

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