HOSPITALITY WORKERS&RSQUO; INTERACTION WITH MULTINATIONAL GUESTS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Hospitality Workers' Interaction with Multinational Guests: a Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

Hospitality is an industry that co-exists with the tourism industry, which primarily provides services in the form of accommodation, food and beverages, and entertainment. Hospitality workers are exposed to multinational guests. Diversity in ethnicity, nationality, culture, and beliefs pose a challenge among hospitality workers. Poor knowledge of dealing with multinational guests can result in bad customer experience and complaints. This research explored the lived experiences of hospitality workers in Cebu with multinational guests. This study utilized a descriptive phenomenological design. Seven key informants are hospitality workers from different areas of the industry who participated in this study. Collaizi's seven steps of data analysis were utilized in the analysis of the descriptions of the informants. Results revealed that: theme (1) hospitality workers face Language barrier problem, theme (2) guests' food preferences are influenced by their ethnicity and religious beliefs, theme (3) Hospitality workers displays qualities of an accultured worker, theme (4) hospitality workers see that dealing multinational guests is a learning opportunity, and theme (5) they think that their experiences can be useful for future work prospect.

Keywords: Lived Experiences, Multinational Guests, Hospitality, Hospitality Workers, Phenomenological Study

Introduction

Hospitality is an industry that primarily provides services to customers or guests, whereby the outcomes of service are measured by how satisfied the guests are. The abundance of natural resources such as white sand beaches and wildlife is among the many things that draw people from different parts of the world to visit a specific destination. The Philippines, an archipelago blessed with natural resources is have always been a popular tourist destination not only with the locals but also foreign visitors. The Philippines has always benefited from the increasing number of foreign arrivals, which is brought by the increased efforts of the government to promote tourism and the development of tourism infrastructure. In 2019, Korea, China, USA, Japan, Taiwan, Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, Singapore, Malaysia, India, and Germany, are the top 12 foreign markets in the Philippines; South Korea topping the markets at 24.08 market share followed by China and the United States (Department of Tourism, 2019).

These foreign visitors visit the different islands in the Philippines, and one of those islands is the Island of Cebu. Its location, rich history and culture, the presence of an international airport, and its richness of tourist attractions made Cebu a popular destination. It is one of the most progressive cities in the Philippines as it houses many big industries apart from hospitality and tourism. Having multinational visitors provides opportunities for the hospitality industry to grow its

business, and as a result, it also provides opportunities for employment and livelihood for small entrepreneurs. The presence of multinational guests has positively affected not only the economy but also the socio-cultural aspects of the country. The constant exposure and engagement of hospitality workers with multinational guests have provided an avenue to learn about the culture of other people from other countries; however, it does not always come easily as that. Multinational guests have different cultural backgrounds, which means we do not share the same ideas and beliefs; this often comes as a challenging factor for hospitality workers as they provide services to their guests. Inadequate knowledge in dealing with multinational guests can result in bad customer experience and complaints.

Social, educational, and pedagogical scientists have long been interested in interpersonal skills and competencies—specific components involved in significant interaction (i.e., social skills) due to intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships. Communication is of utmost importance in the day-to-day life of individuals and societies; this also plays a unique role in intercultural dialogue, since it is a central element in the management of interactions and conflict in a cross-cultural context. It must be understood that the creation of cultural knowledge, combined with the ability to recognize the role those cultural interventions play in influencing communication, offers assets because intercultural ignorance inhabits and sometimes disables the ability to establish substantive interpersonal relationships

with people of different cultural backgrounds. (Pilarska,2015).

The researchers acknowledge the importance of meeting the needs of the guests from different walks of life by having a clear understanding and looking at both the visible and invisible characteristics of the guests having a diverse cultural background. It is for this reason that the researchers took interest in exploring the lives of hospitality workers. The researchers wanted to see from the eyes of the informants their views on having to deal with people from different cultures and how they cope with the challenges that confront them as they deal with this kind of guest.

Research Objectives

The aim of this study was to explore the lived experiences of hospitality workers in handling multinational guests. Specifically, this study will look into the insights, challenges of hospitality workers with multinational guests.

Literature Review

Hospitality organizations increasingly working internationally, create real obstacles for workers and managers to communicate and work successfully with people from different backgrounds. Many problems may include intercultural contact between managers and employees and between employees and guests from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the topic of intercultural communication has recently increased in the hospitality industry. Cultural knowledge, sensitivity, and comprehension should be considered a crucial matter for business growth (Grobelina,2015). According to Kavanagh (2002), (as cited by Pilarska, 2015), the importance of effective communication is well recognized today, and its position cannot be overemphasized, especially in the hospitality environment, where improved communication has been established as the key to quality, productivity, and competitiveness. "Treating people is one of the biggest challenges a manager's faces," and communication is also one of the most challenging areas (Kavanagh, 2002, as Pilarska described, 2015).

Intercultural-sensitive workers offer better support to their international clients and better performance to their superiors. Specifically, they would be more attentive to consumer needs from other cultures. They will use suggestive selling more, generating opportunities for more sales per international consumer. Their interpersonal skills in multicultural workplaces would be more suitable. They would also be happier with their work and more pleased with engaging with foreign customers (Sizoo et al., 2004)

The need to become competitive hospitality workers or professionals cannot be underestimated. Service quality is an expectation in the hospitality industry as quality is measured by the outcomes of the services provided by the hospitality workers. Guests nowadays are looking for added value and service beyond expectation. Dealing with multinational guests requires patience, understanding, and communication competence. Hospitality workers are expected to understand the need of their guests to be able to please them. It is critical to raise and strengthen cultural diversity awareness among hospitality workers through a variety of training and inclusion programs, as well as other initiatives. These actions should help workers identify and understand the perspectives of others, as well as foster trust and respect for people from various cultures. Many people may be encouraged to suggest novel, useful, and culture-oriented service solutions as a result of openness and exposure to culturally diverse points of view (Lee & Chon 2000).

Methodology

The researchers employed a naturalistic approach and followed an atheoretical stance with the phenomenon of interest. There was a suspension of a *priori* assumption, and the researchers did not identify any theory to support the study. They did not interpret as descriptive phenomenology only focuses on the accounts of the informants and lets the facts speak for themselves. A literature review was done after data collection to support the claim and substantiate the description of the phenomenon (Vasquez, 2013).

The researchers utilized the transcendental phenomenology (Creswell, 2016). The researchers trailed an inductive method. The researchers present the phenomenon as described by the hospitality workers' experiences with multinational guests in Cebu, Philippines.

Participants

The researchers utilized a purposive sampling technique with the following inclusion criteria: (a) must have worked as a hospitality provider, be it in the restaurant or hotel or related business for at least one

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year in Cebu. (b) Must have front-line experience with guests/ customers with a multinational background (c) must be willing to participate and give voluntary consent, and (d) must have the relevant and sufficient training in the hospitality industry. Data saturation was reached with 7 informants, with the researchers' judgment, considering they are the main instrument of the study. Data saturation is a point when there is no new data, therefore are most likely no new topics as well; hence, data saturation has occurred (Morse, Lowery and Steury, 2014).

Instruments of the Study

The researchers were the main instrument of this study and utilized a semi-structured interview guide in the conduct of the interview. The researchers interviewed each participant for 20-60 minutes, and all were audio-recorded. The recordings were transcribed and coded to manage systematically.

Procedures

The researchers interviewed each participant for 20-60 minutes, and all were audio -recorded. The recordings were transcribed and coded to manage systematically. Recordings of the interviews were destroyed after the transcription. To prevent biases, the researchers tried to collect data precisely from the informants of the study, yielding accurate data. The data obtained were confirmed using observations, field notes, and transcriptions. Trustworthiness was enhanced thru Guba and Lincoln (1994) as cited by Nowell et al. (2017): (a) prolong engagement, (b) persistent observation, (c) data collection triangulation, (d) audit trail by an external expert.

In the analysis of data, the researchers utilized Colaizzi's method of data analysis, which is appropriate in this qualitative research study. In this method, it went through the seven steps.

Step 1. Familiarization. The researchers went through extensive reading of the accounts of all of the participants using the transcribed interview.

Step 2 Identifying significant statements. Significant statements were identified which are of direct relevance to phenomenon under inquiry.

Step 3. Formulating meanings. meanings deemed relevant to the phenomenon aroused from careful considerations of significant statements were identified by the researchers

Step 4. Clustering themes. The researchers grouped the significant statements which are common across records and arranged them into themes.

Step 5. Developing an exhaustive description. a full inclusive description of the phenomenon was written the by researchers, and incorporated all the themes as produced in the previous step.

Step 6. Producing the fundamental structure. The researchers narrow the description down to brief statements that captured only the aspects which are essential to the structure of the phenomenon.

Step 7. Seeking verification of the fundamental structure. The fundamental structure statements to the participants to verify whether it did capture their experiences. (Morrow, Rodriguez, & King, 2015).

Ethical Considerations

Before the conduct of the study, the researchers obtained ethical approval from an accredited Institutional Review Board; upon the issuance of the notice to proceed (NTP), the researchers proceeded with the interview; the recruitment of participants was based on referrals. Informed consent was given to the informants to ensure that the participation of the informants was purely voluntary.

Result

The results of this study were derived from the significant statements from the key informants. They were coded and presented into themes which are shown below:

Theme 1. Communication: Language Barrier

One of the questions asked to the key informants of this study is their challenges in dealing with multinational guests. The one theme that emerged is communication; the informants shared that working in the hospitality industry allows them to serve guests from different countries. Guests from other countries speak a different language; although the English language is widely spoken across the globe, hospitality workers consider this a problem, as not all guests are good at communicating in the English language.

In the revelations made by the hospitality workers, some are having problems in dealing with nationalities with poor English vocabulary.

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According to one of the informants:

"I find it difficult sometimes when, there are nationals with poor English, like some Chinese, Korean or Japanese."

Similarly, another informant also expressed:

"There are foreigners with difficulty speaking the English language, which sometimes makes it challenging for us to communicate as there is a barrier between us."

In addition to having foreign guests with poor English vocabulary, there are also times when the hospitality workers themselves are having a problem in understanding what was said, especially from guests who have strong accents or those who sometimes talk fast.

"There are foreigners like the native English speakers, like Americans, British, and Australian. These people have different accents and speak fast. I have to really listen carefully for me to understand them."

English communication is a significant precedent for remarkable work in the hospitality industry. English has been considered the universal language, and it is predicted that an employee in the hospitality sector would be more communicative in English to serve guests without regional borders and organize immigrant employees from anywhere in the world. If you are an employee in the hotel industry, you can connect with a tourist, inform the guest about the facilities, the environment, or tourism, organize or exchange messages officially within and between departments, and discontinue a pleasant chat with the guest co-worker. English is well-managed and formal in the hotel industry. An employee at all levels, from the lowest to the highest management levels, must be well versed in hotel English, which needs no literature, repetitive phrases are used as the situation in the industry is more normal and routine. (Disilva & Arun, 2017). The hospitality industry employs a diverse workforce, language barriers continue to exist between employers and immigrant workers. As a result, these impediments have a negative impact on work performance and attitudes within organizations (Madera et al., 2013).

Theme 2. Intercultural Understanding

 Dealing with multinational guests means that one should understand your guest's background; not only in terms of language but also the other elements that make them who they are; this includes their culture and belief, and because of this reality, hospitality workers should be able to look beyond what is seen by their naked eyes. The informants of this study shared their experiences on the matter of having to interact with guests of diverse cultural backgrounds.

"Having guests of different cultural background is can be a challenge and opportunity. It can be a challenge because there might be chance of misunderstanding because I might be an aware of that what I am doing is offensive on the guests' part, and opportunity to learn more about other nationality's cultural background"

In order to serve guests better, hospitality workers should learn other nationalities' culture as they are expected to cater to these kinds of guests. Hospitality workers should recognize the differences and commonalities to create or cultivate good relationships with their guests.

"As a hospitality worker, we should recognize that we are all different. The reality is that people from different is from us in many ways. In my years of experience, I have come to understand and accept that reality"

Luka, (2013) states that when people from different cultural backgrounds misunderstand each other, not only because of language barriers, but also because of cultural differences, problems may arise. As a result, it is critical to understand not only the foreign language but also the cultural differences that exist between countries. Given the global nature of the hospitality industry, cultural awareness and intercultural communication have become critical in dealings with both hotel guests and hotel workers. There are a number of reasons why today's hotel professionals should be aware of these relationships and how they can be managed (Grobelna,2015).

Taylor and McArthur (2009) postulated that hospitality employees are exposed to cross-cultural interactions on a daily basis, requiring them to be aware of a diverse range of customs and cultures.

Theme 3. Accultured Hospitality Workers

Working in the hospitality industry requires not only having the technical skills needed for the areas of housekeeping, food and beverage, and kitchen but also the ability to interact with the guests despite their nationalities or cultural backgrounds. Constant engagement with guests of multinational increase knowledge and there would be a better interaction

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between the hospitality workers and the guests. The more a worker is exposed to multinational guests and learn from their exposure they become accustom to different kind of situations. The informants of the study have the following to say:

"In my years in the industry, I started with little knowledge of cultural background of multinational guests, but as time goes by, I learned from each of my mistakes. I did a little research on different nationalities' background, and through observations I was able to find a way to better interact with them"

"In my experience, the key to understanding other nationalities is to accept that they have qualities or behaviors different from our own. We may have different belief but we simply open our minds, you do not have to agree with them necessarily but you simply respect them because they are after all our guests."

People who believe their work is important and/or contributes to a greater social or communal good have better psychological adjustment and, at the same time, possess characteristics that organizations seek (Sterger, Dik, and Duffy,2012).

Theme 4. Learning opportunity

Experiences are part of our human life; however, a person's experience depends on their perceptions. Hospitality workers are constantly engaged with people of different background, they are times when they are faced with challenges on having to deal with these types of people however, it can also be seen as an opportunity to learn more about other people's lives, and culture. It is when they are confronted with the real-life experience with multinational guests that they capture ideas that were not previously learned. In this inquiry, the informants shared that they consider their experiences as a learning opportunity not only professionally but also personally. The informants have the following to say.

"Each time we interact with guests of multinational background can be unexpected, but for me each mistake is an opportunity for me to learn because how else can we learn if I don't accept that my mistakes."

"For me experiences with multinational guest is a great opportunity for me to indulge myself to different culture, because I am after all part of the hospitality industry. I think we should learn from them in order for us to address their concerns and create a good

customer relationship."

The ability to adapt and manage each work situation are essential qualities of good hospitality workers.

"In my experience, I put in my mind that I should be able to adapt to a culture of understanding towards your colleagues and more importantly your guests; what I meant by adapt is that you know how to address challenges, especially the different culturally driven behaviors of multinational guests."

Theme 5. Experiences can be useful for future work prospect

In any job, people learn from their experiences, and they use those learnings not only within their current work but also to their future work prospects. Experiences help individuals to be a better version of themselves and these experiences help workers to do a better job in their future career prospects. Filipinos thrive to learn through real work experience to be able to get experience as an edge and to prepare themselves for the possibility to work abroad. The informants of this study shared that their experience will be their stepping stone to have a better job in some other places with greener pastures. The hospitality workers have the following to say:

"For me, I think, my experiences with multinational guests equipped me with intercultural skills that I can use in my current work and maybe someday when I work somewhere else, perhaps abroad. I think I can interact easily."

"I believe my experience with multinational guests, be it good or bad, can be useful in my career prospect as I have a plan of working abroad."

Previous work experience may influence an individual's adjustment to a new organization, according to a large body of literature (Adkins, 1995).

Discussion

The findings in this study present the experiences of hospitality workers with multinational guests—their experiences present lessons on the challenges in dealing with people of international backgrounds. The study suggests that being exposed to a culturally diverse working environment, such as the hospitality industry, has given valuable learning experience to hospitality workers; this includes understanding

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different behavior and preferences, enhanced flexibility, adaptability, and, most importantly, communication and interpersonal skills. As challenging as it may seem, hospitality workers always find ways to overcome them because they have gained a deeper understanding of the inevitability of dealing with multinational guests in the industry that they belong to.

Conclusion

The hospitality workers' experiences have opened doors of opportunity to explore jobs with a higher level or a higher pay grade; this results in more fulfillment and job satisfaction. this is evident in the increase in the number of people employed in the hospitality industry, locally and internationally. Hospitality workers, through their employers, find themselves looking for ways to enhance their communication skills so that they can perform well in their job as a service provider. As a result, this has made Filipinos one of the best in delivering customer service and preferred by most service-related companies abroad. Educational institutions should provide training and develop curriculum emphasizing intercultural communication for their students to answer the need of the industry; similarly, hospitality businesses should provide training on dealing with guests from other countries.

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