APPROACHING COMPETITIVE STRATEGIESAND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN CITY HOTELS

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In this paper the implementation of Human Resources Management (HRM) practices related to hospitality selection, staffing and job design is to be explored according to the hotels' business strategy categorization. The HRM practices are also tested for any positive effects on specific performance variables. Schuler's and Jackson's (1987) typology was used to capture the strategic groups (Othman and Ismail, 1996; Wei, 2006; Liao, 2005; Kelliher and Perret, 2001) in the hospitality sector (Tavitiyaman et al., 2012; Alleyne et al., 2006; Hogue, 2000). HRM practices were adopted by Kim Hogue's (2000) research in Great Britain's hospitality and tertiary sector, while the selection of variables measuring the hotels' performance was based on relevant scientific literature (Tzafrir, 2006; Liao, 2005; Tseng and Lee, 2009; Azmi, 2010; Stavrou et al., 2007; Wang and Syu, 2008). The survey's outcomes highlight the need of hotels' to focus on the proper selection and staffing systems-procedures. The differentiations among the strategic groups, according to the implementation of HRM practices, are pointed out and discussed.

Keywords:*hotels, HRM, selection, staffing, job design, performance*

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kim Hoque (2000) argues that in the past, interest on human resources (HR) issues in the hospitality industry was to some extend limited. However, nowadays, through the increased number of researches in HRM new approaches have come forth. Interest focuses, among others, on the affect of HRM practices on organizational performance (Alleyne et al., 2006; Chand and Katou, 2007; Tavitiyaman et al., 2012; Nankervis, 1993), HRM performance (Ahmad et al., 2010; Hogue, 2000; Alleyne et al., 2006), individual HRM practices, such as job satisfaction (Gallardo et al., 2010; Fisher et al., 2010), staff commitment (McGunnigle and Jameson, 2000), and service innovation (Chang et al., 2011).

According to Guerrier and Deery (1998) through their bibliographic research in 156 books and scientific papers, selection and staffing, but also the meaning and content of the strategic management of HR, are frequently explored. Strategic management is a set of processes–approaches to address the competing challenges of tourism enterprises (Noe et al., 2003). Tyson and York (2000) argue that HRM issues must be taken into account at every stage of business strategy formulation. Experience in HRM and the knowhow of strategic planning play a vital role on business outcomes and performance (Thompson and Strickl, 1998). HR executives, who are not aware of the involvement of the activities of HR in strategic needs, will find that this process takes time and persistence in order to achieve specific goals.

Available researches on the relationship between business strategy and strategic management of HR are both theoretical and empirical (Ferris and Buckley, 1996). Schuler and Jackson (1987), suggest that the existence of clear corporate and operational strategy is a prerequisite for effective integration of HRM in strategic decision making. In the past, selection, staffing, and job design in hotels was the work of the personnel department (Kelliher and Johnson, 1987) which, through its evolution, participates in decisions related to the operational management (Kelliher and Johnson, 1997) and strategic planning (Raub et al., 2006). Today they are part of

complex HRM systems (Ahmad et al., 2010) of hotels, representing high frequency's factors of research in HRM overview. In the Greek hospitality sector, HRM practices have been explored on the basis of comparison of domestic personnel selection and staffing methods with corresponding abroad (Paraskevas, G., 2000) while the hospitality market of Thessaloniki has not been investigated in terms of HRM.

METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this paper is to explore the affects of selected HRM practices (selection, staffing and job design) on organizationalperformance (labor productivity, service quality, financial performance, market share, sales growth, service innovation) and HRMperformance (staff commitment, job satisfaction, staff flexibility, staff rotation, quality of staff, quality of work).This is a case study which contributes in scientific research through combined exploration of the interaction of specific HRM practices on organizational performance. The following research hypotheses were tested:

1st Hypothesis-H1: Selection–staffing and job design causes a positive and direct affect in hospitality organizational performance

2nd Hypothesis-H2: Selection-staffing and job design causes a positive and direct affect in HRM performance.

Pearson chi square was used in order to explore the correlations among the variables. Crosstabs which indicate significances < 0.05 suggest that there are positive and direct affects on the depended variables of organizational and HRM performance. The questionnaire is based on the same tool that Kim Hogue (2000) used in his research in the field of HRM in the tertiary and hospitality sector of Great Britain. From the set of the independent variables, those related to selection-staffing and job designs were selected.The contribution of the present research is related with the enrichment of previous scientific research's conclusions, tested exclusively on city hotels, enabling relevant comparisons and interesting conclusions.

Thessaloniki's hospitality market, which by the time of the survey amounted 64 hotels (source: Hellenic Chamber of Hotels),had been chosen for the survey's conduction. Being the second largest city in Greece and

offering a variety of alternative tourism services such as, among others, archeological tourism, convention tourism, city breaks, e.tc, Thessaloniki's hospitality market was selected to be tested for the first time on HRM applications.At the same time there had been serious efforts in Thessaloniki the past few years in developing city tourism and city breaks. Nevertheless, corresponding research has not yet come to pass. Based on the total number of rooms, a dozen hotels have capacity exceeding one hundred rooms; fifteen are between 65 and 99 rooms while the rest have less than 64 rooms. 72% of the city's hotel population (all the hotels had been invited to participate in the survey) allowed their hotel manager or HR manager to answer the questionnaire. The large percentage of participants can ensure sufficiency for safe outcomes.

The presentation and analysis of the research outcomes is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the hotels policies and practices on the one hand in personnel selection and staffing and on the other in job design. In the second central part any positive correlations among the HRM practices and the hotel performance are explored.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

According to Schuler's and Jackson's (1987) typology and Kim Hogue's (2000) methodology hotels were divided into the following strategic groups: cost reducers (28.26%), quality enhancers (41.31%) and strategic group "others" (30.43%) consisted of hotels which do not apply any of the cost reducing or quality enhancing strategy.In order to develop the strategic groups respondents were asked to select two of the features that portrayed their business strategy: price, quality, cost control, responsiveness to customer needs, advertising / marketing, providing a distinctive service.

Selection and Staffing

The first group of HR practices (selection and staffing), will be examined as to their approach from the hotel businesses according to their business strategy.

Education and training

Recruiters consider applicants' education and training background as a key initial assessment criterion when CV and job applications are evaluated. But when it comes to the decision making process, do they play a vital role also? Hotels belonging to cost reducers chose "yes" with a rate of 69.2% and "partially" (30.8%). Only two hotels of business strategy "others" (4.3%) replied negatively. The rest of the hotels(quality enhancers) replied "yes" and "partially" of percentages 68.4% and 31.6% respectively. There had been no negative response for any hotel belonging to one of the above two strategic groups. Either completely or partially the educational level is a key factor in the final selection of new employees. Business strategies do not seem to differentiate the corporate policies, at least as it is interpreted by this variable analysis.

Communicating the firm's culture to new employees

The process of communicating the firm's culture to new employeesis a practice based upon the belief of best fit among HMR strategy and business strategy. The general theoretical approach, in practice, refers to the early stage of the evaluation of candidate employees, where the corporate philosophy is presented alongside employee's perceptions on matters related to their job. The goal is to make distinct any common or diverse attitudes and perceptions between the firm and the employee since, according to best fit theory, the better qualified candidates are not always the better choice. Table 1 presents the executives' responses regarding this particular HRM practice when it is applied in the decision making process.

Table 1 Communicating the firm's culture to new employees

	Yes		Partially		No	
Cost reducers	23.1%	3	38.5%	5	38.5%	5
Quality enhancers	63.2%	12	15.8%	3	21.0%	4
Others	28.6%	4	28.6%	4	42.9%	6
Total	**41.3%**	**19**	**26.1%**	**12**	**32.6%**	**15**

Quality enhancers (63.2%) seem to employ this practice more than the rest of the population since 12 among 19 hotels answered "yes". Cost reducers are divided between the three available options while the same thing happens with "others" were most of the negative responses are observed (6). Analyzing the responses under the prism of the business strategy, a differentiation of quality enhancers is distinguished. In general, however, a tendency rather towards the adoption of the practice arises with different, in cases, intensity of implementation per hotel.

Deliberate use of job previews

The third practice refers to the use of deliberate job previews in order to test the candidates under realistic working conditions.

Table 2 Deliberate use of realistic job previews

	Yes		Partially		No	
Cost reducers	69.2%	9	30.8%	4	.0%	0
Quality enhancers	52.6%	10	31.6%	6	15.8%	3
Others	71.4%	10	7.1%	1	21.4%	3
Total	**63.0%**	**29**	**23.9%**	**11**	**13.0%**	**6**

Monitoring the candidates' performance can be done either through simulation of realistic working situations or in real working environment, assigning tasks which are concluded in their job descriptions. Hotels classified as "cost reducers" are the unique strategic category that has not given any negative response. Hotels with an ambiguous approach to business strategy present the most positive (yes) responses (71.4%), while "quality enhancers" the fewest (52.6%). Interestingly,a clue which can explain the hotels' attitudes, is that the Greek law gives hospitality firmsthe right to retain new recruits for a limited period of time without the obligation to compensate in case the staff proves to be ineffective to its responsibilities. It seems that, according to the responses, the hotels make use of the relative advantage, since the only inhibitory factor is the

alternative costs that may occur. This particular practice emerges as strategic feature of"cost reducers" and "others".

Job design

Completing the selection process, the responsible executives must now introduce the new employees to their working environment and present them their duties-responsibilities. Job design in hotels definitely depends on many factors and its composition is subject to even more.In this paper, four relevant factors are to be investigated: flexible job descriptions, deliberate job designs for complete utilization of staff's skills, teamwork orientation and staff's participation in setting performance goals.

Flexible job descriptions

The usage of job descriptions in hotels ensures that new employeesare formally informed in every detail of their duties according to the organizational and operational standards. Job descriptions can in some cases be specific, brief with clear guidelines and instructions, and in others encourage initiatives, extraversion and innovation. Among the "cost reducers" only one hotel responded negatively to the use of flexible job descriptions and the remaining were divided equally in the options of "yes" (46.2%) and "partially" (46.2%). Approximately the same percentages were encountered in "quality enhancers" with also a single negative response, 42.1% to "yes" and "52.6%" to "partially". The third strategic categorization ("others") was the ones which specified most of the negative responses (28.6%), limited however in terms of strategic differentiation.

Table 3 Flexible job descriptions

	Yes		Partially		No	
Cost reducers	46.2%	6	46.2%	6	7.7%	1
Quality enhancers	42.1%	8	52.6%	10	5.3%	1
Others	42.9%	6	28.6%	4	28.6%	4
Total	**43.5%**	**20**	**43.5%**	**20**	**13.0%**	**6**

Deliberate job design

The second variable of the HRM practices, investigates the degree of utilization of distinguished abilities and skills of employees during organizing and planning of jobs. "Quality enhancers" with a percentage of 68.4%, gave the most of the positive responses. More specifically, 13out of 19 hotels with strategic orientation to quality improvement responded that either totally or partially they implement deliberate job designs. "Cost reducers" were equally separated to "yes" (46.2%) and "partially" (46.2%) while in "others" occurred more or less similar results with 42.9% in "yes", 50% in "partially".

Table 4 Deliberate job design

	Yes		Partially		No	
Cost reducers	46.2%	6	46.2%	6	7.7%	1
Quality enhancers	68.4%	13	26.3%	5	5.3%	1
Others	42.9%	6	50.0%	7	7.1%	1
Total	**54.3%**	**25**	**39.1%**	**18**	**6.5%**	**3**

Overall, more than half (54.3%) of the hotels indicate clearly that they plan and organize jobs in a way to make full use of their staffs' skills and abilities, and a smaller percentage of the population (39.1%) partially adopts this particular practice.

Work is organized around teamwork

According to the responders' views, teamwork's role is of increased importance and significance. Only "others" have given a negative response but, at the same time, they are the group with the most positive responses (78.6%). "Quality enhancers" follow with a percentage of 63.2% and finally, last but not least, the "cost reducers" with a remarkable high percentage of 61.5%.

Table 5. Work is organized around teamwork

	Yes		Partially		No	
Cost reducers	61.5%	8	38.5%	5	.0%	0
Quality enhancers	63.2%	12	36.8%	7	.0%	0
Others	78.6%	11	14.3%	2	7.1%	1
Total	**67.4%**	**31**	**30.4%**	**14**	**2.2%**	**1**

A 38.5% of "cost reducers", 36.8% of "quality enhancers" and 14.3% of the third category responded "partially". According to these data, all hospitality firms, regardless their business strategy, approach teamwork similarly positively. However, "others", to a certain degree, seem to fully and totally adopt teamwork since they presented the highest percentage in "yes" responses.

Staff is involved in setting performance goals

The last HRM practice which composes job design is of particular interest as it examines the role of staff in setting performance goals for the hotels' departments. A role through which attitudes are tested and confidence on opinions and views is deliberately given by the administrations.

Table 6 Staff involvement in setting performance goals

	Yes		Partially		No	
Cost reducers	23.1%	3	23.1%	3	53.8%	7
Quality enhancers	31.6%	6	36.8%	7	31.6%	6
Others	42.9%	6	28.6%	4	28.6%	4
Total	**32.6%**	**15**	**30.4%**	**14**	**37.0%**	**17**

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Correspondingly to the previews case, the most responses to "yes" occurred from "others" (42.9%). "Quality enhancers" followed with a percentage of 31.6% while most of the negative attitudes are among the "cost reducers" (53.8%).By summing all of the hotels responses, a generally perspective can hardly be cleared out. What it seems more safe outcome is that "cost reducers" are rather negative in allowing their staff to set performance goals. It is indeed the HRM practice were most of the negative responses aroused.

Correlations and hypothesis testing

The variables investigated on the basis of business strategy, in the first part, are explored in the second part, according to their relationship with organizational performance and HRM efficiency.

Selection-staffing and organizational performance

The first group of the independent variables refers to "selection and staffing" and any positive effects on organizational performance are explored.Table 7 presents in detail the values of Pearson chi square and the corresponding significances, values that may indicate positive relations.

Table 7[1]Selection–staffing and organizational performance

Pearson chi square	Education–training as majorselection criterion		Deliberate use of realistic job previews		Communicating firm's culture	
	value	sig.	value	sig.	value	sig.
Labor productivity	7.013	**0.03**	0.349	0.911	8.708	**0.013**
Service quality	11.077	**0.004**	0.284	0.156	9.9	**0.007**
Financial	0.281	0.869	0.1	0.474	2.2	0.33

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[1] In tables 7-10, the more statistically significant correlations are marked bold.

performance			82			3
Market share	2.316	0.314	0.3 26	0.113	0.76 7	0.68 1
Sales growth	7.664	**0.022**	0.5 15	0.818	3.22 3	0.2
Service innovation	9.055	**0.044**	3.3 43	0.502	10.5 14	**0.03 3**

According to the crosstabs' outcomes, education and training as a major selection criterion presents the most positive correlations in four out of six dependent variables since significance values are<0.05. Labor productivity (0.03), service quality (0.004), sales growth (0.022) and service innovation (0.044) are positively and directly affected when candidates' qualifications are of highly importance during the selection process. No positive effects on hotel's financial performance and market share have occurred. Service innovation (0.033), service quality (0.007) and labor productivity (0.013) are directly and positively affected from communicating the firm's values to new employees. Financial performance, market share and sales growth significance values are >0.05, dependencies among these variables are rejected. The third practice, which refers to deliberate use of realistic job previews, does not affect positively any of the business performance variables according to Pearson chi square and significances (>0.05).

Selection–staffing and HRM efficiency

The effects of the selected HR practices are now tested on HRM efficiency. The deliberate use of realistic job previews affects directly and positively staff flexibility (0.045) but also the ability of staff to move between positions with different responsibilities when the need is required (0.033). Many positive correlations have occurred from communicating the firm's culture to new employees, since significance values militate towards this conclusion.

Table 8 Selection–staffing and HRM efficiency

Pearson chi	Education–	Deliberate use of	Communicatin

square	training as major selection criterion		realistic job previews		g firm's culture	
	value	sig.	value	sig.	value	sig.
Staff commitment	0.121	0.728	2.194	0.334	7.774	**0.021**
Job satisfaction	6.307	**0.043**	0.29	0.865	0.802	0.12
Staff flexibility	2.56	0.634	9.763	**0.045**	13.763	**0.008**
Ability to move	4.194	**0.041**	6.798	**0.033**	0.682	0.711
Quality of staff	2.736	0.098	0.983	0.612	6.104	**0.047**
Quality of work	3.349	0.085	1.702	0.427	4.822	0.09

Staff commitment (0.021), staff flexibility (0.008) and quality of staff (0.047) seem to be also positively related to this HRM practice. Education and training does not indicate many positive correlations in HRM efficiency as it did on organizational performance. However, it positively and directly affects job satisfaction (0.043) and the ability of staff to move between different positions (0.041).

Job design and organizational performance

In this section the influence of HRM practices belonging to the group "planning and organization of work" are tested on organizational performance. Based on the significance values, flexible job descriptions affect directly and positively only one variable, the quality of the services offered (0.01). The rest of the crosstabs support the independence among the variables. None of the organizational performance variables seems to be related to the use of deliberated job designs since significances are >0.05.

Table 9 Job design and organizational performance

Pearson chi	Flexible job	Deliberate job	Work organized	Staff

square	descriptions		design		around teamwork		involvement in setting performance targets	
	value	sig.	value	sig.	value	sig.	value	sig.
Labor productivity	4.951	0.084	0.844	0.656	0.874	0.646	1.072	0.585
Service quality	9.13	**0.01**	3.92	0.141	6.109	**0.047**	2.113	0.348
Financial performance	0.205	0.902	0	1	0.793	0.673	0.271	0.873
Market share	1.957	0.376	1.073	0.585	5.11	**0.024**	3.894	0.143
Sales growth	2.669	0.285	2.233	0.327	2.714	0.194	0.625	0.732
Service innovation	8.649	0.07	6.402	0.171	5.256	0.262	5.143	0.273

Most of the positive correlations of the specific crosstabs occur from the approach of teamwork in job design as it directly and positively affects the service quality (0.047) and market share (0.024). Staff involvement in setting performance targets fails to affect any of service innovation, sales growth, market share, financial performance, service quality and labor productivity. The majority of the current Pearson chi square values have significances >0.05 therefore it can be said that the variables are independent and organizational performance is not related to the specific HRM practices group.

Job design and HRM efficiency

The final presented crosstabs tested the relation among the HRM group of variables "selection and staffing" and the dependent variables which measure HRM efficiency. The positive correlations that have aroused in this case are presented in table 10 and, as in the previous cross tabulation, dependencies among the variables are limited. Nevertheless, two variables of HRM efficiency seem to be positively related to selection–staffing practices in six out of eight crosstabs, therefore the outcome can be quite different when it is approached individually for each dependent variable.

Three out of four HRM practices cause a positive and direct affect on staff commitment and job satisfaction.

Table 10 Job design and HRM efficiency

Pearson chi square	Flexible job descriptions		Deliberate job design		Work organized around teamwork		Staff involvement in setting performance targets	
	value	sig.	value	sig.	value	sig.	value	sig.
Staff commitment	0.284	0.868	4.129	**0.044**	9.733	**0.008**	11.034	**0.004**
Job satisfaction	0.221	0.895	8.455	**0.015**	8.383	**0.015**	12.025	**0.002**
Staff flexibility	0.456	0.796	0.921	0.631	1.841	0.398	3.158	0.206
Ability to move between positions	1.865	0.394	2.617	0.27	1.226	0.542	1.832	0.4
Quality of staff	0.982	0.612	1.498	0.473	2.351	0.309	0.51	0.816
Quality of work	0.447	0.8	1.702	0.427	2.865	0.239	5.141	0.076

The use of deliberate job design (0.044, 0.015), promoting team work (0.008, 0.015) and staff involvement in setting performance targets (0.004, 0.002) suggest that the hypothesis which refers to positive relations among HRM practices and HRM efficiency should be accepted. Indeed, Pearson chi square values, alongside the very low significances indicate that the existed dependencies are also very strong. The only HRM variable which failed to affect positively any of the dependent variables is the use of flexible job descriptions. The current Pearson chi squares are rated very low, most <1 and the significances are far from the boundary separating dependence and independence. Staff flexibility, ability to move between different positions, quality of staff and quality of work are not affected by any of the explored HRM practices.

CONCLUSIONS

In order to test the two hypotheses, 96 individual crosstabs have been performed among the HRM policies which refer to selection, staffing and job design and the variables which measure organizational performance and HRM efficiency. A total of 22 positive correlations have emerged, 23% of

the 96 crosstabs, leading to a first conclusion that certain HR practices can affect directly the hotels' performance. Judging by the overall results, we reject cautiously and without prejudice the H1 and H2 hypotheses which explore the existence of dependency and positive correlations between HRM practices and performance measurement variables. The reservation lies in the fact that the positive correlations that emerged could support a hypothesis of dependency exploring solely the specific variables. Interesting findings derive when approaching the outcomes separately through one by one cross tabulation in relation to the business strategy and the HRM practices implementation.

The communication of firm's culture to new employees, according to the results, is adapted to a higher degree by the hotels which belong to quality strategy.According to the Pearson chi square and the significances values, quality enhancers which implement the above HRM practice enhance their staff's quality of work, quality of staff, service quality, labor productivity, staff flexibility, service innovation and staff commitment. In the same strategic categorization, it is occurred that job satisfaction and staff commitment are favored through the use of deliberate job design. Hotels that formulate an ambiguous strategy-"others", emerged to pay more attention in designing jobs based on team working, gaining through this practice positive effects on service quality, staff commitment and job satisfaction. Considering organizational performance, their above average market share seems to be related also. On the contrary, hotels that apply cost reduction strategy lag in staff commitment and job satisfaction of their employees as they are the most reluctant strategic group in involving their staff in setting performance targets. Interpreting the results further, no major differences among the applied strategies occur, according to the implementation of the explored HRM practices. Differentiations are located mostly in the intensity of the HRM practices implementation, rather than in the decision to adopt them or not. The positive, direct and immediate correlations that arose within the organizational performance and HRM efficiency increase the significance of the implementation's intensity.

The research's findings largely advocate to related surveys that the approach of HRM in business strategy is a field that can contribute both in

scientific and in hotel business development. Safer findings, when exploring the affects of HRM practices on performance results, can be achieved when the occurred positive correlations of the overall population or sample are further explored according to the hotels' business strategy. Through this approach researchers can retrieve and determine which combination of business strategy and HR lead to a direct affection on hotels' performance through HR practices.

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