PEDAGOGICAL TECHNIQUES IN LIFE LONG LEARNING AND HOSPITALITY

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Abstract

Hospitality instructors in Life Long Learning Institutions as well as Hospitality Executives in most cases need to improve their pedagogical skills in order to train employees to meet company's goals and objectives. The scope of this paper is to suggest efficient methods in order to assist Hospitality instructors and executives in their training on the job tasks, and thus to improve employee's satisfaction and ultimately, to increase guest satisfaction. Firstly, an examination of the theoretical approach is made on Innovation and Quality Circles. Then suggests the Imagination, Innovation, Adaptability, (IM.I.A.) approach as training method. Lastly, examines the findings of a practical approach for instructors and executives - via Field Study- in the Greek hospitality industry.

Key words: Imagination, Innovation, Adaptability (IM.I.A.), Soft Skills, Quality Circles, Greek Hospitality Industry, Employee's Satisfaction

1. Introduction

Enhancement of employees' soft skills within the hospitality sector plays a vital role, since in most of the time they interact with guests and the overall task to be performed necessitates initiative, imagination and adaptability. Executives face difficulties how they can foster soft skills to front line employees. On the job training it is more convenient for them to give emphasis to routine tasks and to technical skills. Moreover, in Lifelong Training Centers, instructors face the same difficulties when training of participants of various departments of hotels occurs. Furthermore, employees need support when preforming their tasks especially when are in front line working positions and encounter the needs and wands of guests. Living space for initiatives potentially facilitates management and employees' motivation.

Yet the unique challenges that an executive meets in practice when is performing as an instructor and/or as an executive, constitute the *Imagination, Innovation, Adaptability (IM.I.A.)* concept a potential powerful tool for employees' increased performance.

2. Methodology

The methodology of this research was based on two main pillars: Secondary research and Field Study. In specific:

A. Secondary data.

A theoretical approach on secondary data took place examining the topics of: a) Innovation, b) Quality Circles and c) The Greek Tourism Industry

B. Field Study

On the Field Study Emphasis was given in the planning, implementation and evaluation of 7 different groups of 25 students each – 175 in total - in Life Long Learning Institutions. The duration of each seminar was four weeks with additional time for individual research before or after lessons. The method that has been used was the formation of Quality Circles with setting the objectives for each group by the participants themselves. The implementation took place during December 2014 - to March 2015 in Life Long Learning Institution with topic "Innovation". The students (sample) where form various target groups within the service sector and in particular from the tourism and hospitality industry (*See Table 1*). The members of the groups, where from various departments of hotels of all types mainly from 4 and 5* categories. During implementation of the "Bottom up" approach was used with various implications to both Life Long Learning Institutions & Hospitality Organizations. In the latter case, this approach could

implement in training sessions on the "job training" with respective results. Evaluation of the seminars clearly have shown that participants are more prone to set the standards of their performance especially when are dealing with complex tasks.

Limitations

The major limitation of the Implementation of such teaching approaches methods is that the results of each individual/ participant of each group has performed is very difficult to be measured. Although the deliverables and the group work is clear the degree of the participation of each member was not clear. The nature of the objective set, the experience of the participants along with their background, constitutes the setting of objective performance criteria a complex task.

3. Innovation

The most comprehensive definition of the term innovation is given by Chris Freeman (1982): "industrial innovation includes technical design, production, management and marketing associated with the introduction of a new (or improved) or the first commercial application a new (or improved) process or equipment."

Innovation is defined as "the use of knowledge in order to produce and provision of new products or services that consumers want. "The Innovation that can refer to a new product or a new service to their production methods or technology used, as in the administrative structure of an organization". (Tomala, & Seneccal, 2004).

3.1. Innovation Development Forms

A company can develop and implement three basic forms of innovation, based on its scope:

a) the *Innovative Product or Service*,
b) *Innovation on Production Processes* and
c) *Organizational Innovation* (Phelps, et all 2007), (Omachonu & Einspruch 2010), (Chang 2011).

4. Soft skills vs. Hard Skills

4.1. Soft skills

Since there are various definitions and various debates of the extent and the content of Soft Skills to facilitate the purpose of this article, Soft skills could be defined as a term often associated with an individuals' characteristics, the cluster of personality traits, social and communication skills, knowledge of foreign languages, personal habits, friendliness, managing people, leadership, etc. that characterizese relationships with other individuals. Hard skills, are generally easily quantifiable and measurable, for instance Front Office software knowledge, basic cleaning skills in Housekeeping, while as soft sills are not easy to be measured..

Within the above context, Innovation, Imagination and Adaptability, as part of Soft Skills are set into test in order to prove their efficiency in the work place of the Hospitality industry as well as within the Lifelong Learning process.

4.2. Hard Skills

On the other end the Hard/ Technical skills can be as all the professional qualifications necessary for every specific task that needed to be performed in the respective hotel department. For example, in the Food and Beverage (F & B) department of a hotel, the knowledge, experience and skills that a master chef needs in order to deliver culinary products.

5. Quality Circles

5.1. Definition of Quality Circles: They are small groups of employees 5-15 persons who perform the same or similar work, come together at regular intervals to determine the causes of labour problems that arise in the workplace, suggest solutions to senior Management of the company and responsible for implementing their proposals, if this is possible.

The problems with which mainly involved members of a Quality Circle are as follows:

a) Improve the quality of manufactured products, b) Conditions of safety, c) Reducing production costs, d) Improvement of the production process but even with problems of the overall improvement of quality of life in the workplace.

The Quality Circles are not the very essence of organization and the structure of formal Project Teams, with the traditional sense, within the official structure of the enterprise. They lack the principle of authority, as expressed in the relationships between executives and subordinates- existing in a typical

project team (Departments, Administration etc.). Another key element that distinguishes Quality Circles from traditional formal working teams/groups is the voluntary participation of members and the free withdrawal from the group if they wish. The Quality Circles operate in parallel but independently of the formal organization of the firm for the success of their own goals, ideally defined by the base (team members).

The Quality Circles have their own organization and differ greatly from traditional organizational structures operating in businesses in Western Societies such as: Task Force, Semi-autonomous groups learning groups in the workplace.. These differences mainly refer to: a) the clarity and advance fixing of team objectives, b) the leadership of these teams, provided by members of senior Management (Task Force), c) the main object of interest, d) to the extent of flexible participation and withdrawal of members from the group (Semi-autonomous work group and e) the subject employees' education (Drucker, 1981).

6. Characteristics of the Greek Hospitality Industry

It is worth mentioning that every Quality Circle is unique. Thus, the hotel manager or the instructor respectively must elaborate IM..I.A. not only with the different variety of employees / students experiences and backgrounds but also has to take under serious consideration the overall PEST environment that the Institution/ Organization is operating in. This is if for instance, the Political. Economic, Social. Technological (PEST) environment is as also told «Hostile», the hotel management should take this fact into account when formulating the Quality Circle/ team. In particular, when for instance the overall economy of a country is under recession, he would act differently as the overall economy is at its best. By the same token employees'/ students' values and attitudes may vary among participants of the team - Quality Circle, thus once again selection of members should be granted as very important.

Furthermore, by the term «Hostile» environments probably a wide area of variables -beyond economic recession- could be included. The micro- environment of the hotel company or the educational institution is a good example when interpreting hostile environments. Loans, debts, shortage of employees, low annual occupancy, new emerging tourism destinations, and shift of customers' expectations are namely some examples of hostile environments. In addition, the characteristics of tourism employment are in brief as follows:

Small size of the hotel business.. 95% of hotels in Greece are small to medium size). In addition is worth mentioning that out of the 9.670 Hotels in Greece only 348 are 5* star hotels (See table (SETE. 2013, Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, 2013).

labour intensive

the majority of the workforce has limited qualifications and attracts workforce from other service sectors which face recession

time pressure mainly due to the encounter with guests

high demand fluctuations (seasonality), This accounts annually, monthly weekly and even on a daily basis

low salaries of employees and executives in comparison with other service industries

hospitality employees and executives are forced to internal migration in order the workforce to meet tourism demand with supply

complex services

diversity of tasks (Front Office, Food & Beverage, Housekeeping, Sales, Animation and others)

managers face difficulties to measure employees' performance and satisfaction (Papayiannis, 2003).

7. Implications for the hospitality Industry

7.1. IM. I.A in Practice in the Hospitality Industry The Bottom up approach

The IM.I.A concept could be used in the Hospitality Industry in practice for both hospitality organizations as well as training institutions. What is important that it should be based on the "Bottom up approach", i.e. give space to employees and trainees to build up with no limits and borders their own goals and objectives. In contrast, the classical "instructing" top - down approach should be inefficient and thus will minimise the potential abilities of the participants. (See Figure 1). Moreover, in the case that complex tasks needed to be performed, the Bottom up approach is more likely to succeed in terms of productive ideas. On the contrary the top-down approach is more likely to be efficient on daily routine tasks that not require anything else but obedience (Papayiannis, 2003, 345- 370).

Setting the Team – Quality Circle

Selection of members of the team is a prerequisite for the efficient workflow of the overall task. In addition, according to each unique qualification that each member has, can actually work as team member later on when contribution of all is required.

It is important to emphasize that participation in such teams is on a voluntary basis.

Figure 1

IM. I.A in Practice in the Hospitality Industry

The Bottom up approach

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│             Proposing and Suggesting             │
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│            Setting Goals and Objectives          │
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│                Fostering IM. I. A.               │
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│    Facilitation by Hotel Management – Lifelong   │
│                 Learning Centres                 │
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│         Setting the Team – Quality Circle        │
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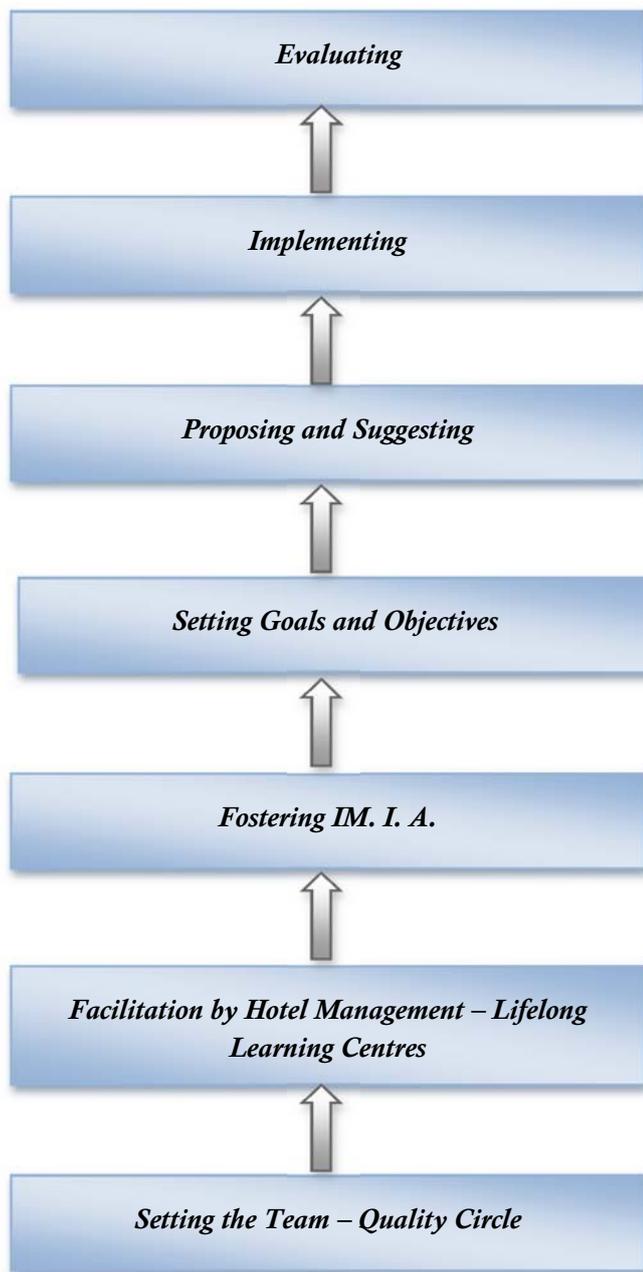
Source: By the authors

Facilitation by Hotel Management – Lifelong Learning Centres

Both the Hotel Management when training on the job is fully accepted and Lifelong Learning Centres should facilitate all needs and wants of the members of the team.

For instance if the actual formation of the team needs to be set out of the working hours, then the management need to provide the appropriate meeting room.

Fostering IM.I.A. Culture to the Team

Fostering Imagination, Innovation and Adaptability (IM.I.A.) culture in the formatted team requires the following steps taken by the instructor/ manager of the Hospitality Organization:

a) Creating Class Culture, b) Describing aims and Goals, c) Set expectations d)Brain storming, e) Suggestions/ alternatives, f) Implementations g) Propose and evaluate

Setting Goals and Objectives

Setting the team Goals and Objectives is crucial. The team highly respects these objectives since they are not instructed by any other senior executive or is not part of the routine daily tasks need to perform on a daily basis. Therefore, the sense of pride is involved for a "job well done". The team leader that arises among other members of the team, due to soft skills he/she has, takes initiatives and the burden of failure or success of these set objectives.

Proposing and Suggesting

The team then proposes and suggests solutions and alternatives either to the senior management or to the team itself, in order to proceed to implementation. In the latter case, the team feels more obliged to achieve the objectives that have set for its self.

Implementing

The implementation of the task is rather a priority than an obligation on behalf of the team members. In fact they are looking forward to see if what they proposed can be implement in reality. Since the management has authorized them to implement their own proposals the overall members' job satisfaction will be increased. Furthermore the degree of this satisfaction lasts even when the team will end its task and members will go back in their usual working positions. In the case of Lifelong training

institutions, where students-members of the team go back to their hotel organizations still the overall job satisfaction remains strong at least for a short period of time.

In addition, if the management of the respective hotel will follow the proposals and suggestions of the team, then the grade of job satisfaction will further be increased.

Evaluating

As an aftermath, the team makes a self-assessment both for their overall performance as a team and of the individual input of each member. Is crucial to mention that this evaluation is been made by the members themselves and not by the senior management.

7.2. IM.I.A. in Life Long Learning Institutions & Hospitality Organizations

It has already been implemented in 7 different groups of 25 students each during December 2014 - to March 2015 in Life Long Learning Institution with topic "Innovation". The participants where form various target groups within the service sector and in particular from the tourism and hospitality industry. The members of the groups, where from various departments of hotels of all types mainly form 4 and 5* categories. During implementation of the "Bottom up" approach was used with various implications to both   Life Long Learning Institutions & Hospitality Organizations. In the latter case, this approach could implement in training sessions on the "job training" with respective results. In specific:The IM.I.A. concept applies equally to both Lifelong Learning Centers and Hospitality Executives. The former gives the opportunity to students to enhance their potential in class while as the in the latter case the hospitality employees can increase their productivity.

Means of Facilitation

Provide to trainees, students and employees all necessary means in order to facilitate their work. Delete obstacles and provide them the appropriate tools for self- development. In turn complex tasks that require mental input will be solved with less effort.

Enhancement of Soft Skills

Enhance all types of soft skills in order to adjust each one of them in the respective situation in the work place or in the class.

Fostering IM. I. A.

With the use of interactive teaching methods, the IM.I.A. culture could be fostered among participants. In specific the following tools could be used in practice: a) Group work, b) Role playing, c) Case studies d) Simulations, e) Assignments

Formation of Quality Circles

Formation of Quality Circles is only one potential tool that might be used if the instructor/ educator/ manager will decides that this is the most appropriate if the all other variables are suitable for the case in question. Once again if the overall environment as well the qualifications of the target group and s the nature of the task are favorable, then the choice of Quality Circles could be useful.

Achieving Goals &Objectives

The means to achieve goals and objectives is also important. The team -Quality Circle- are more prone to implement projects, problem solving techniques and so on. Moreover, when the team will actually materialize the outcome of their work can more easily to transfer the results or at last the methodology use in their own working environments. In particular, the experience gained by the methodology used in the Lifelong Training Centres will be very useful in the training sessions and the team formulation in the hospitality organizations.

Customer's Satisfaction &Profitability

As an aftermath employees' or/and trainees participation in such training pedagogical seminars will increase job satisfaction and thus to a better job performance. Thus this will lead to a potential customer's satisfaction and increased companies' profitability

OVERALL ENVIRONMENT - PEST ASSESSMENT

Instructors always should take under consideration the overall environment that the Lifelong Learning institutions or the hospitality organization is operating in. A political, economic, social and technological assessment is vital. Thus in each specific variation an instructors should be able to adapt new tools and pedagogical methods (See Figure 2).

Figure 2

IM.I.A. in Life Long Learning & Hospitality Organizations

Source: By the authors
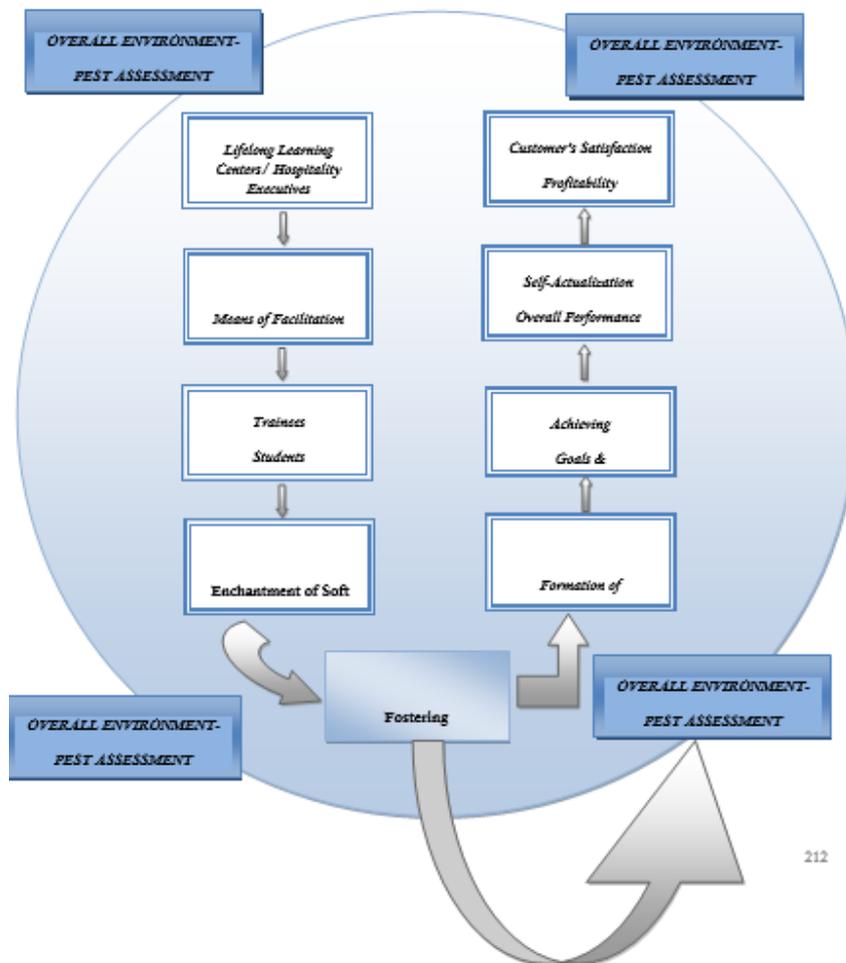
8. Conclusions

To conclude, the *IM.I.A.* approach could prove useful tool for enhancing both employees' and students' involvement in decision making and thus to increase self-motivation and ultimately to job satisfaction. The Quality Circles might be used in practice; however it is up to the instructor/ manager to choose the appropriate pedagogical method. He can use his own Imagination, Innovative approaches and his Adaptability to the specific Political, Economic, Social and Technological parameters given to each particular organization. Even if the participants are not adequately able to perform in such team working conditions he/she could find alternatives by using the IM.I.A. concept. Further research is required related

to the hospitality industry, in order to have more concrete and definite conclusions. Nevertheless, the aforementioned approach remains valid and could be used as «pilot» for further comprehensive research concerning the Human Capital in the Hospitality Industry.

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