

Strategies and Mechanism of Training in Travel Agencies

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Abstract:

This research aims at highlighting the fact that despite the global competition travel agencies in Egypt face, and despite the severe threats they confront, yet there are no definite methodical strategies and plans adopted for training in most travel agencies.

Part of the threat springs from neglecting the persistent need for developing a quality workforce capable of facing global trends towards increased competitiveness.

Achieving this goal mainly requires setting effective training strategies particularly regarding the development of a whole series of new competence-based programs with a mature blend of skills and knowledge.

This research also aims at studying the plans adopted for training in the Egyptian travel agencies to develop a quality workforce capable of facing global trends towards increased competitiveness. To solve this problem, recommendations were proposed. One of the most important recommendations is: setting effective training strategies particularly regarding the development of a whole series of new competence-based programs with a mature blend of skills and knowledge.

The study resulted in: despite the global competition travel agencies in Egypt face and despite the severe threats they confront, yet there are no definite methodical strategies and plans adopted for training in most travel agencies.

Key words: Training, travel agencies, SWOT analysis, training process.

Introduction:

The important role the employees play in the success of service organization, and the issue of human resource management is made more important in hospitality industry by unique characteristics of services, which present specific challenges in designing, marketing, maintaining and monitoring service quality. (Go. F.M., Mona Chello, M.L. Baum T. 1996).

Therefore, effective human resource management practices are becoming a critical factor in the success of hospitality industry. The industry requires its managers and workers to be specially trained and/or educated to work effectively in such a customer oriented organization (Chen and Lee, 2000).

Training is defined as any attempt to improve employee's performance on a currently held job or on one related to it. This usually means changes in specific knowledge, skills, attitudes or behaviors. To be effective, training should involve a learning experience, be a planned organizational activity, and be designed in response to identified needs.

Ideally training should be designed to meet the goals of the organization while simultaneously meeting the goals of individual employees growth. (Bernardin, Russel, 1998).

There has been growing recognition over the last decade of the importance of a skilled workforce as the basis of competitive economic advantage. This has led to increasing attention being paid to initial and continuing vocational education and training. (Sission, 2001).

Training must be viewed as an ongoing developmental process, not a simple solution to a short-term problem. Therefore, training must be relevant, informative, interesting, and applicable to the job, and it must actively involve the trainee. As Confucius put it: "I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand". (Leonard, Hilger, 2004).

The Importance of Strategic Planning to Training:

The key idea underlying strategic planning is that of strategy for each business, the company must develop a game plan for achieving its long-run objectives. Furthermore, no one strategy is

optimal for all competitors in that business. Each company must determine what makes the most sense in the light of its industry position and its objectives, opportunities, skills, and resources. (Kotlen, Bowen, Makens 2003).

Strategies should be unique. The best result from a process of creative design. They should build on the particular 'core competencies' of the organization. (Price, 2004).

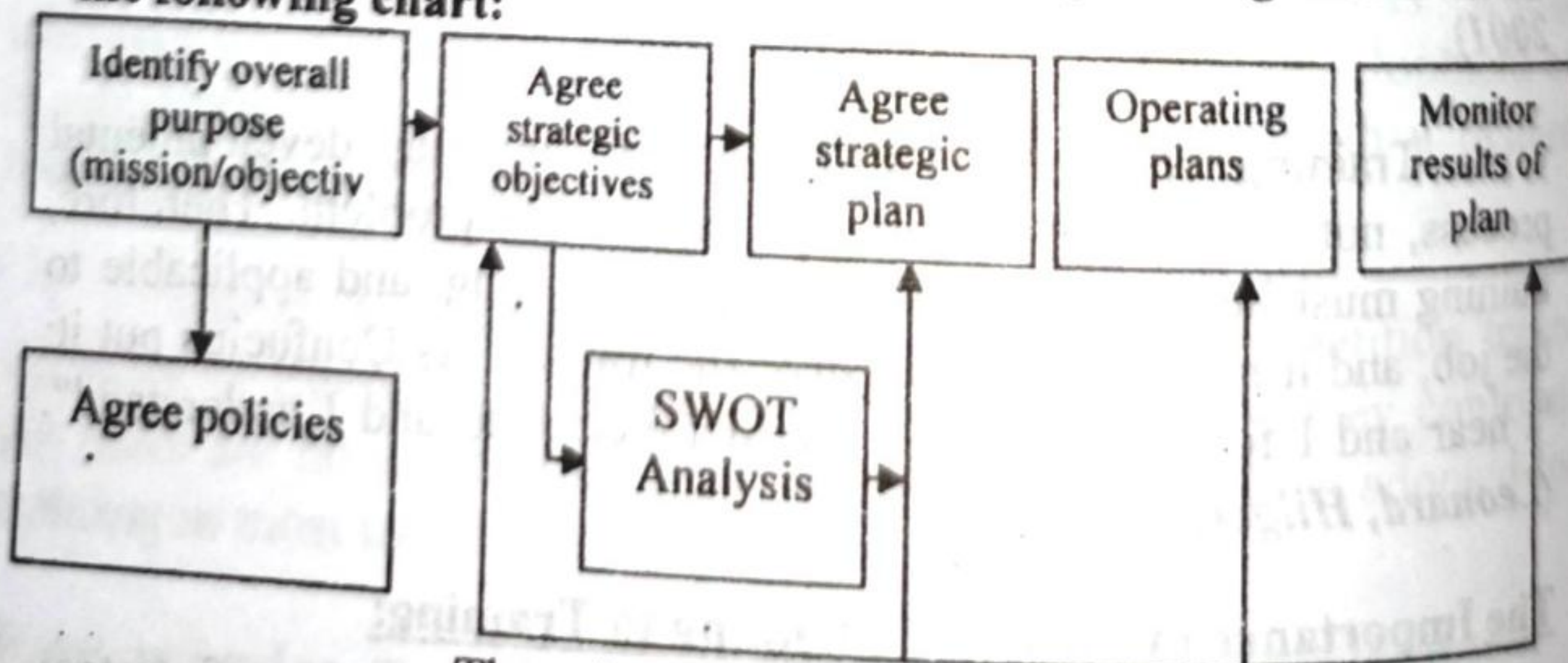
Job competency can be understood to mean "an underlying characteristic of an employee (i.e., motive, trait, skill, aspects of one's self-image, social role, or a body of knowledge) which results in effective and/or superior performance in a job." (Rothwell, W., 2001).

Apart from publishing them directly within the organization, schemes are easily recognized. Indications are follow-up on training, assessing individual requirements, appropriate coaching and advice, discussing future roles and organizational objectives, stressing conceptual skills development, organization, whereas competencies are determined by the key requirements in the particular job (including roles) and the associated team. (Betts, 2000).

SWOT Analysis:

SWOT is an acronym for an organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. A SWOT analysis is a technique for evaluating an organization's internal strengths and weaknesses and its external opportunities and threats. A major advantage of using a SWOT analysis is that it provides a general overview of an organization's strategic situation. The underlying assumption of a SWOT analysis is that managers can better formulate a successful strategy after they have carefully reviewed the organization's strengths and weaknesses in light of threats and opportunities the environment presents. (Rue, Byars, 1997).

SWOT Analysis plays a significant role in planning as shown in the following chart:



The role of SWOT Analysis in planning Feedback and revise

Source: (Bowdin, McDonnell, Allen and O'Toole, 2001).

Strategy SWOT: The purpose of internal analysis is to establish what the organization is good at (its strengths) and what it is not so good at (its weaknesses).

The second stage in strategic analysis is an examination of the organization's external environment (an external analysis).

It is important to understand that a detailed internal and external analysis is a necessary prerequisite for the SWOT information - if emerges from the internal and external analyses. *(Evans, Campbell, Storehouse, 2003)*

Identifying the current strategy involves more than looking up the strategy that managers wrote down the last time strategy was formulated. *(Saloner, Shephard, Podolny, 2001)*.

Therefore the following aspects should be determined in order to conduct effective training:

- The strategic area, i.e. standards that describe the strategic decision-making processes including organizational planning, setting targets and mission statements.
- The operational and technical area, i.e. standards that operationalise the mission and strategic planning statement for the organization.
- Operational management, i.e. standards that enable the operational statements to be distributed and delivered effectively.
- Organizational management, i.e. standards that describe the contributions of individuals to the management and effectiveness of the organization.
- The value base, i.e. standards that represent the core values, ethics and behaviors that underpin good practice in an organization. *(Gerber, Lankshear, 2002)*.

The Training Process:

- Determining preconditions of learning:

Trainees must be ready to learn before they are placed in any training program. To ensure this, human resource (HR) professionals should determine whether trainees are trainable (i.e., whether they have the ability to learn and are motivated to learn). In addition, HR professionals should try to gain the support of trainees and their supervisors before implementing the program.

In addition to generating the support of trainees for training, the support of their supervisors, coworkers, and subordinates who are not supportive of training: should be sought. Then they may not facilitate the learning process (e.g., allow employees time off for

training, reward them for using new skills). (*Bernardin, Russel, 1998*).

- Conducting needs assessment:

A popular approach to planning the assessment process includes the following steps:

1. Define the objectives of the assessment process
2. Identify data necessary to conduct the assessment.
3. Select a method for gathering the data (questionnaires, interviews, surveys, etc.).
4. Gather the data.
5. Analyze and verify the data. Prepare a final report.
6. Prepare a final report.

These steps may be customized to fit the individual needs of the company, but a plan always helps to produce favorable results. (*Rue, Byars, 1997*).

- Developing learning objectives:

Although training program can be developed without deriving learning objectives, there are several advantages to developing them. The process of defining learning objectives helps the HR professional identifies criteria for evaluating training programs. Learning objectives direct trainers to the specific issues and content to focus on. This ensures that trainers are addressing important topics that have been identified through strategic HR planning. Also, learning objectives guide trainees by specifying what is expected of them at the end of training. Finally, specifying objectives makes the HR department more accountable and more clearly linked to HR planning and other HR activities. (*Bernardin, Russel, 1998*).

- Establishing Training Objectives:

After training needs have been determined, objectives must be established for meeting these needs. Training objectives can be categorized as follows:

- 1- Instructional objectives:
 - What principles, facts, and concepts are to be learned in the training programs?
 - Who is to be taught?
 - When are they to be taught?
- 2- Organizational and departmental objectives:
 - What impact will the training have on organizational and departmental outcomes, such as absenteeism, turnover, reduced costs, and improved productivity?
- 3- Individual performance and growth objectives:

- What impact will the training have on the behavioral and attitudinal outcomes of the individual trainee?
- What impact will the training have on the personal growth of the individual trainee?

When clearly defined objectives are lacking, it is impossible to evaluate a program efficiently. (*Rue, Byars, 1997*).

- Selecting the Appropriate Methods for the Training Program:

Training methods can be divided into two categories:

- 1- methods that are primarily informational or transmittal in nature; that is, they use primarily one-way communication in which information is transmitted to the learners;
- 2- methods that are experiential in nature; that is, the learner interacts with either the instructor, a computer/simulator, customers, or other trainees to practice the skill.

Most training programs use several training techniques since no one approach is best suited for every purpose.

At a minimum, the training methods selected should:

- motivate the trainee to learn the new skill;
- illustrate the desired skills to be learned;
- be consistent with the content (e.g., use an interactive approach to teach interpersonal skills);
- allow for active participation by the trainees to fit with the adult learning model;
- provide opportunities for practice and over learning;
- provide feedback on performance during training;
- be structure from simple to complex;
- encourage positive transfer from the training to the job;
- be cost-effective. In many cases, trainers will use several different techniques. For example, teaching supervisors how to give performance feedback may first begin with a lecture or overview of the performance appraisal process, followed by small-group discussions or videotapes for effective coaching, and then role-plays to have supervisors practice their feedback skills. (*Ashton, Sung, 2002*).

- Selecting the appropriate process:

This step specifies in detail the processes and sequences required to transform inputs into products or services.

It includes a wide range of decisions about the specific process to be used, the basic sequences of the process, and the equipment to be

employed the product/service design decisions and the process selection decisions should be closely coordinated. (*Rue, Byars, 1997*).

- **Business-driven action learning:** (as practiced in some of the world's best) involves the following five key elements:

- The active involvement and support of senior executives.
- Participants working in teams on real business issues and exploring new strategic -business opportunities.
- Action research and learning focused on internal and external company experiences and thinking that can help resolve business issues.
- Leadership development through teamwork and coaching.
- Follow-up on the business issues and leadership development, thus enhancing positive business results and ensuring that learning is greater than the rate of change. (*Price, 2004*).

- **Developing the training program:**

After a needs analysis has been conducted and the HR professional is confident that training is needed to address the performance problem or to advance the firm mission, the training program is developed. This can be done by an in-house training staff or by outside consultants. Following this, the HR professional should examine various training methods and techniques to choose the combination most beneficial for accomplishing of the instructional objectives of the training program. (*Bernardin, Russel, 1998*)

- **Obtaining feedback:**

Feedback can be positive or corrective. **Positive feedback** consists of giving a reward to employees when they something correctly or well. Positive feedback includes raises, bonuses, promotions, formal recognition at department meetings, or just plain praise. Positive feedback tells employees what they are doing well and encourages further efforts. Most important, positive feedback actually prevents discipline problems from occurring later on.

- **Corrective feedback:**

Involves showing employees a quick way to solve a problem related to performance. It also shows employees what to do in order to work more efficiently and effectively. (*Supervisory-Skill Builders: Improving Employee Performance, 1996*)

- Evaluation design as a learning process:

Evaluation in its various forms is one of the primary means by which organizations shift from a "blueprint" approach regarding program development to more of a "learning process".

To a whole program of activities conducted on an ongoing basis by an educational or social agency.

The evolution is important to build up the reflective and learning capacities of the entire organization to which they belong while increasing its store of relevant insight about its own operations and the opportunities and challenges in its environment. (*Life at work in the Information Economy, 2001*).

Methodology:

The field study had been carried out through distributing questionnaire forms to the 'person in charge' of training in each travel agency. The researcher 'randomly' distributed the questionnaire forms among travel agencies in greater Cairo, category A. 40 questioner forms were distributed and all returned.

The questionnaire form consists of the following types of questions:

Range questions, open-ended question.

Pie charts were utilized to represent percentage data.

The researcher also utilized chi-square analysis in order to verify the results obtained as shown in the following tables* :

Results and discussion:

The following table identifies the person in charge of performing training in travel agencies:

Variable	Distribution	N	%	X ²	Sig
The person in	The supervisor	17	29%	14.02	Sig at level
	The direct manager	24	40%		

- * - % is approximated to the nearest whole number
- In questions 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 18 items of the sample could choose more than one answer.
- N: number of responses.

charge of performing training	The manager	4	7%		0.01
	An external professional trainer	14	24%		
Total		59	100%		

The person in charge of performing training in travel agencies.

The table above shows that χ^2 is equal to 14.02, which is significant at level 0.01 and which indicates that there are differences in the distribution in "the person in charge of performing training in travel agencies" (the supervisor, the direct manager, the training manager and an external trainer) in favor of the direct manager (40%). It is thus obvious that travel agencies rarely depend upon external professional trainers which deprives most of the agencies from acquiring more skills and experiences different from those being internally cascaded inside the company.

Generally, the new employee's manager has primary responsibility for training in how to perform the job. Sometimes this responsibility is delegated to a senior employee in the department. (Rue, Byars, 1997).

The supervisor is usually responsible for training at the workplace and is the instructor. (Betts, 2000).

The following table identifies the training resources that are available in the travel agencies which are necessary for conducting effective training:

Variable	Distribution	N	%	χ^2	Sig
Training resources	No training resources	10	14%	7.00	Non sig at level 0.05
	Professional trainers	8	11%		
	Equipped training areas	17	24%		
	Training material benchmarked to the best practice and standards	14	20%		
	Budget allocated for training	7	10%		
	Time dedicated for training	15	21%		
Total		71	100%		

The training resources in the travel agencies.

The table above shows that Chi² is equal to 7.00 which is non significant at level 0.05. this indicates that there are non significant differences in the distribution of the training resources available in the travel agencies. (professional trainers, equipped training areas, budget, training material or time dedicated for training).

The previous responses indicate that there is shortage in the training facilities (e.g. training area, budget & training material, particularly regarding the budget allocated for training which should be incorporated in the company's overall budget. Besides there is also shortage in the equipped training area, and training material benchmarked to the best practice that should be developed by one experienced person who combines both practical and pedagogical experience.

Management must agree a budget to cover all possible expenditure for equipment, teaching materials, a training centre and instructors. The quiet atmosphere of a classroom is ideal for lecturing and discussions; a training centre may accommodate lectures, demonstrations and practice; the workplace provides the atmosphere of reality and is therefore useful for advanced practice. (Betts, 2000).

The following table demonstrates the methods applied in order to determine the 'need' for training in travel agencies:

Variable	Distribution	N	%	X ²	Sig
Method	Obtaining feedback from staff	27	52%	0.77	Non sig at level 0.05
	Obtaining feedback from customers	25	48%		
Total		52	100%		

Methods applied to determine the 'need' for training in travel agencies.

The table above shows that Chi² is equal to 0.77 which is non significant at level 0.05. This indicates that there are non significant differences in the distribution of the methods used to determine the 'need' for training in travel agencies (obtaining feedback from staff or form customers).

The methods applied to determine the 'needs' for training would include obtaining feedback from both staff and from customers, which is essential to verify these needs from more than one source staff could be either internal staff inside the organization or field staff.

Trainees must be ready to learn before they are placed in any training program. To ensure this, HR professionals should determine whether trainees are trainable (i.e., whether they have the ability to learn and are motivated to learn). (*Bernardin, Russel, 1998*).

The following table identifies the tools used to specify training needs through feedback obtained from staff:

Variable	Distribution	N	%	X ²	Sig
Tools	Through meetings	32	52%	0.15	Non sig at level 0.05
	Through reports	29	48%		
Total		61	100%		

Tools used to specify training needs through feedback from staff.

The table above shows that Chi² is equal to 0.15 which is non significant at level 0.05. This indicates that there are no significant differences in the distribution of the tools used to specify training needs through feedback from staff. These tools also include meetings held between the person(s) in charge of training with the staff and reports received from them.

A supervisor or an H.R representative should meet with the employee to be sure that he or she is effectively "learning the ropes" of the organization. (*Bernardin, Russel, 1998*).

The following table identifies the tools used to specify training needs through feedback obtained from customers:

Variable	Distribution	N	%	X ²	Sig
Tools	Questionnaires to assess quality of service	25	61%	1.98	Non sig at level 0.05
	Face to face feedback	16	39%		
Total		41	100%		

Tools used to specify training needs through feedback from customers.

The table above shows that Chi^2 is equal to 1.98 which is non significant at level 0.05. This indicates that there are non-significant differences in the distribution of the tools used to specify the training needs through the feedback obtained from customers either through questionnaires delivered to them in order to assess quality of service or through face to face feedback.

Consumer or customer surveys can also indicate problem areas that may not be obvious to the employees of the organization. Responses to a customer survey may indicate areas of training for the organization as a whole or within functional units of the organization. (Rue, Byars, 1997).

The following table identifies the tools utilized in travel agencies in order to assess the efficiency of training performed:

Variable	Distribution	N	%	X^2	Sig
Tools	Performance evaluation/appraisal	24	35%	1.13	Non sig at level 0.05
	Reports from direct manager	26	37%		
	Reports from customers	19	28%		
Total		69	100%		

The tools used to assess the efficiency of training.

The table above shows that Chi^2 equals 1.13 which is non significant at level 0.05. This indicates that there are non significant differences in the distribution of the tools used to assess the efficiency of training conducted in the travel agencies, either through performance evaluation/appraisal, reports from direct manager or reports from customers.

Performance appraisal is the systematic assessment of how well employees are performing their jobs and the communication of that assessment to them. (*Leonard Hilgert, 2004*).

The following table demonstrates the tools utilized to set training strategies in travel agencies:

Variable	Distribution	N	%	X ²	Sig
Tools used to set the training strategy	Performance evaluation/appraisal	16	30%	3.11	Non sig at level 0.05
	Market needs analysis	24	44%		
	Follow up on fulfillment of objectives	14	26%		
Total		54	100%		

The tools used to set training strategies in travel agencies.

The table above shows that Chi² is equal to 3.11 which is non significant at level 0.05. This indicates that there are no significant differences in the distribution of the tools used to set the training strategies in travel agencies (either through performance evaluation/appraisal, market needs analysis, or through follow up on fulfillment of objectives).

The above mentioned tools should be utilized more frequently and intensively in travel agencies in order to achieve more effective training strategies.

Based on the performance appraisal, the coach develops a plan for improvement. Specific improvement goals are set. The employee receives instruction and is given an opportunity to practice. The coach provides feedback and encouragement. (*Leonard, Hilgert, 2004*).

The following table demonstrates the training needs in travel agencies:

Variable	Distribution	N	%	X ²	Sig
Training needs	Enhance generic skills	17	24%	3.58	Non sig at level 0.05
	Enhance tour operation skills	30	42%		
	Enhance selling skills	24	34%		
Total		71	100%		

The training needs in travel agencies.

The table above shows that Chi^2 is equal to 3.58 which is non significant at level 0.05. This indicates that there are non significant differences in the distribution of the training needs in travel agencies (enhancing generic skills, tour operation skills or selling skills). This reveals that travel agencies need to enhance training for a wide range of skills.

Planned training programs include individual programs'. These are usually based upon the selection, interview and feedback from performance appraisals. (Betts, 2000).

The following table shows whether SWOT analysis is performed in travel agencies or not:

Variable	Distribution	N	%	X^2	Sig
SWOT analysis performed.	Yes	8	21%	12.73	Sig at level 0.01
	No	30	79%		
Total		38	100%		

Performing SWOT analysis in travel agencies.

The table above shows that Chi^2 is equal to 12.73 which is significant at level 0.01 and which indicates that there are differences in the distribution of 'performing SWOT analysis' in travel agencies in favorite of No: (79%).

This indicates that the highest percentage of travel agencies are unaware of the relation between performing SWOT analysis and conducting competency-based training programs and its effect on the overall performance of the employees in the organization.

It is important to stress that the strategies chosen must be congruent with the findings of the SWOT analysis, or the environmental scan becomes a waste of time and intellectual energy, and results in inappropriate strategy selection. (Bowdin, McDonnell, Allen and O'Toole, 2001).

Conclusion:

From the previous results we conclude that the scientific principles applied in the training conducted in travel agencies are not

sufficient and need to be enhanced and applied methodically in order to obtain more effective and efficient training.

- Travel agencies rely on the direct manager to conduct training (40% of the responses) which deprives these agencies from being exposed to external experiences and skills other than those being internally inside the company. Besides the experience cascaded from the direct manager to the employees might need to be updated and adapted regularly according to the rapid changes in the market needs.
- There is shortage in the training facilities in travel agencies (e.g. training area, budget, training material) particularly regarding the budget allocated for training which should be incorporated in the company's overall budget.
- The needs for training is determined in travel agencies through obtaining feedback from both customers and staff which is required to verify these needs tools utilized to specify the training needs through obtaining feedback staff included conducting meetings and through reports received.

Comments stated that other tools could be utilized like monitoring sales rates (drop in sales) through sales reports and through monitoring staff performance.

- Tools utilized to specify training needs from feedback obtained from customers included questionnaires and face to face feedback.

Besides, comments included that reports and complaints received via e-mail and through telephone calls from customers could also represent a source for providing feedback.

- Tools used to assess the efficiency of training conducted in travel agencies include performance evaluation and reports from both, the direct manager and customers. Comments also included assessing the employees' efficiency through practical and theoretical tests.

These tools need to be analyzed correctly and methodically on regular basis in order to obtain effective training.

- Travel agencies utilize specific tools to set the training strategy (e.g. performance evaluation and market needs analysis).

These tools need to be enhanced, increased and used more frequently on regular basis.

- When asked to identify the training needs in the travel agencies, responses revealed that they need to be trained on a wide range of skills, both generic and technical.

This indicates that there is increasing awareness of the importance of training which has to be enhanced through more awareness campaigns.

Besides, the person(s) in charge of training in these travel agencies should be well trained on how to develop market-driven training programs.

- The highest percent of travel agencies replied that they even didn't "know" what SWOT analysis was. Such responses indicate that there is no awareness of the relation between conducting SWOT analysis and enhancing the overall performance of the employees in the organization through developing market driven competency-based training programs.

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الملخص العربي

استراتيجيات وآليات التدريب في شركات السياحة

تواجه العمالة المصرية - لاسيما في مجال السياحة - تحديا حقيقيا في ظل المنافسة العالمية التي تتسم بالتطور التكنولوجي المذهل في كافة المجالات. وتحتاج مصر في هذه الفترة الحرجة التي يمر بها اقتصادها القومي إلى العمالة الماهرة والمدربة حتى يتسنى لها مواجهة التحديات الحالية والمستقبلية على حد سواء.

فرضية البحث:
تدني مستويات الأداء المهاري للعاملين في المجال السياحي نظرا لعدم تطبيق الأسس العلمية الحديثة للتدريب في شركات السياحة.

أهداف البحث:
1. توضيح أهمية التدريب كمطلب أساسي للحصول على العمالة الماهرة القادرة على المنافسة في ظل المتغيرات العالمية وذلك من خلال رؤية معاصرة ومفهوم حديث.

2. التأكيد على ضرورة إتباع المنهج العلمي الحديث في التدريب وذلك بهدف زيادة القدرة التنافسية للعاملين بالمجال السياحي.

3. توضيح أهمية وضع الاستراتيجيات والخطط التدريبية للوصول إلى أفضل المستويات الأدائية لتحقيق أهداف الشركة والحصول على نصيبها العادل من السوق.

4. توضيح الآليات المختلفة لتطبيق الخطط التدريبية بالشركة.
وقد انتهجت الدراسة في هذا البحث كلا من منهجي البحث المرجعي والبحث الميداني.

أولاً: البحث المرجعي:

تضمن البحث المرجعي الموضوعات التالية:

- مفهوم التدريب وأهميته من خلال رؤية معاصرة.
 - التدريب وعلاقته بالتخطيط الاستراتيجي للشركة.
 - الوسائل والأساليب المتبعة في التدريب في شركات السياحة.
- ثانياً: الدراسة الميدانية: تضمنت الدراسة الميدانية استمارة استقصاء الرأي والتي تم توزيعها عشوائياً على شركات السياحة بالقاهرة الكبرى (فئة أ)

نتائج البحث:

- عقب جدولة البيانات وتحليل المعلومات التي تم الحصول عليها باستخدام الأساليب الإحصائية تم استخلاص مجموعة من النتائج والتي كان من أهمها:
- 1- عدم تطبيق وسائل وأساليب التدريب بطريقة فعالة في تنفيذ التدريب في شركات السياحة.
 - 2- وجود قصور في التسهيلات المخصصة للتدريب في شركات السياحة كالميزانية المخصصة للتدريب ووسائل التدريب.
 - 3- قلة الوعي التدريبي بصفة خاصة فيما يتعلق بأهمية دمج الخطط التدريبية مع التخطيط الاستراتيجي للشركة.

المقترحات:

من المقترحات التي تضمنها البحث أن تقوم وزارة السياحة (بصفتها جهة رسمية) بالتعاون مع الإتحاد المصري للغرف السياحية بإنشاء هيئة عليا للتدريب السياحي ليصبح من أهم اختصاصاتها الإشراف على التدريب في كافة شركات السياحة وتوفير كافة السبل للتأكد من الجودة التي يتم بها استخدام الوسائل والتقنيات الحديثة.

الكلمات الدالة: التخطيط الاستراتيجي - التدريب - شركات السياحة.