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Prospects for Manpower Development in Tourism Sector: Re-training for Relevance in the Post Covid-19 World

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Abstract

Regardless of growth in manpower development and the available complex training programmes, tourism businesses continue to face a number of challenges in upskilling and reskilling the work force. Even though lifelong learning has been promoted by most businesses, low skilled employees have been excluded from participation. Most businesses invest their training in highly skilled individuals and less on low-skilled employees. The paper uses a qualitative approach where in-depth interviews were conducted with key tourism stakeholders. The results show that measures have been put in place for supporting sustainable tourism recovery, promoting greener tourism systems and transition into the digital age to make the sector more resilient post Covid-19 pandemic. With the rapid change in the global technological environment, the tourism industry is facing lack of skilled manpower in emotional and technology intelligence to fix the existing job opportunities. Thus, the pandemic has forced many organisations to accelerate the adoption of digital technologies and digital offerings at a faster rate. Hence, the use of technology has improved service delivery across sales, customer service and operations. There are a number of benefits associated with upskilling and re-skilling of employees which vary from inclusive growth to reduction on unemployment benefits dependency. Re-skilling the employees to be life-long learners and critical thinkers would ultimately benefit the organizations and help employees in their self-growth. This paper integrates different approaches in preparing employees during the new normal to respond to the changing employment scenarios in times of uncertainties, transformations, and challenges. The paper explores new trends on training that would support the development of relevant competencies and skills in the labour market. The paper concludes that cooperation and creativity, continuous professional development and IT have to change the tourism business and help other sectors to adapt and enter into a new digital transformation age.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Emotional Intelligence, Covid 19 Pandemic

Introduction

Namibia has a tiny population which is approximately 2.3 million and is classified by the World Bank as an upper middle-income country. Even though the country is being classified as an upper middle-income country, it is faced with a number of developmental challenges which have affected its growth potential. The way the World Bank determines a country's income status distorts the reality on the ground regarding the country's income classification. For instance, the approach used by the World Bank tends to disadvantage countries with a relatively small population end up with a higher per income capital yield. The World Bank's approach is favourable to countries with a bigger population, it does not take into consideration income distribution and other economic structural imbalances within the country. Regardless of growth in manpower development and the available complex training programmes, tourism businesses continue to face a number of challenges in upskilling and reskilling the work force (Tshabalala, 2022). Geingob argued that by using this approach and because Namibia has a relatively small population the country ends up yielding a higher per capita income, while aspects like how this income is distributed and other structural imbalances in the country's economy are not considered (Tshabalala, 2022). Even though lifelong learning has been promoted by most businesses, low skilled employees have been excluded from participation. Most businesses invest their training in highly skilled individuals and less on low-skilled employees.

Covid – 19 pandemic has demonstrated that we are living in a Turbulent Environment that is uncertain. The Impact of the Covid -19 pandemic caused a deep contraction in the global economy with tourism being the most affected. This phenomenon is not the first and will not be the last considering the changes that are happening around us. The lessons learnt from Covid -19 are vital in redirecting business processes on the significance of technology. Covid -19 pandemic cause many challenges for businesses particular in the Tourism Sector (Islam, 2021). Most businesses prioritised investing in training of highly skilled individuals and less on low-skilled employees. Due to the velocity of transmission, governments globally decided to introduce restrictions to curb the disperse of the virus. As a result, working from home is now the new formula for assisting lecturers, to facilitate the learning process and students learn and do their course assigned tasks and projects in the comfort of their home. Virtual learning is now converting a vital part of the education system. Full classrooms, the hustle and the bustle, talks and play are now given the aura of digitalization. Online learning technologies are succeeding in transforming the students' living room into a classroom, especially with the modern regulations and policies influenced by the Covid -19 pandemic.

Aim

The aim of the paper is to examine the measures that has been put in place by tourism businesses to support sustainable Tourism recovery, promote greener tourism systems and transition into the digital age to make the sector, more resilient post Covid - 19 pandemic. The research seeks to discuss the impact of rapid change in the Global Technological Environment, analyse the challenges faced by the Tourism industry and evaluate the strategies put in place by Tourism businesses in skilling and re- skilling their manpower on emotional and technology intelligence as we evolve into the new digital transformation age.

The objectives of the research were to

- discuss measures employed by Tourism business in upskilling and re- skilling their work focus beyond Covid -19 pandemic.
- analyse ways in which organisations promote lifelong learning for their low skilled employees
- examine the strategies employed by Tourism business in prioritising training programmes for their employees.
- discuss the rate of adoption of digital technologies and digital offering in the Tourism industry.
- analyse the approaches employed by Tourism businesses to prepare their employees for the changing labour market needs.

Literature Review

During the Covid 19 Pandemic, most organizations adopted the new norm of working from home or teleworking. Since the announcement by the World Health Organization on Covid 19 as a global pandemic in 2020, it became evident that it will not be business as usual, considering the closure of borders, lockdowns, travel restrictions and other health protocols. The travel bans threatened business continuity globally and, in some cases, revenue was lost, and businesses closed. With the exception of essential services like hospitals, logistics, retail outlets and others were allowed to operate at a minimum output and the rest either closed or worked remotely from home. Even though it was chaotic from the start, working from home was found to be the most preferred modus operandi, for business continuity in order to minimize the spreading of Covid -19 pandemic (Tshabalala, 2022). As a result, most organizations allowed their employees, to work from home fulltime. There were different levels of restrictions where level five (5) was complete shut down and Level one (1) had only a few restrictions that was maintained, borders were opened, and businesses were allowed to operate at full capacity. Employees who tested positive with no symptoms were not forced to isolate. However, those who tested positive with symptoms were expected to isolate for seven (7) days instead of (10). It was not necessary for contact to quarantine unless they had symptoms.

The Covid -19 Pandemic has ushered a new way of doing business, since organizations, started experimenting on hybrid work models even after the pandemic. The hybrid approach has led to the introduction on the widespread use of technology. Subsequently the world has witnessed an extra -ordinary paradigm shift particularly on the Tourism business sector which has seen a huge increase in the demand led technology services. Covid -19 pandemic and the resulted lockdown across the world have only accelerated the trends of digitalization, mobile and internet penetration, and technology adoption (Holla, 2020). These changes have amplified the use of digital tools within organization, to allow a continues form of cross functional, collaborative, and remote work. The pandemic fought changes has catalyst, transformation across business models, channels, and touch points, driven by the need for greater organizational agility and a tighter engagement with the clients (Jain, 2022). In the post Covid -19 World, Tourism businesses need to respond and adapt to a slew of digital services and incorporate them into their business operations. Tourism business leaders need to embrace technological innovations that will produce unique digitally enabled solutions across sectors, such as education, health, Tourism, and financial services (Jain, 2022). To fight the risk caused by prolonged pandemics, businesses need to be armed with modern

technology, software applications and processes for them to overcome such challenges whilst self-guarding their staff and businesses prosperity. Establishing universal access to internet, digital platforms and cutting age technology, has become a necessity in every economy (Hola, 2020).

Re-Skilling and Upskilling

Many organisations reportedly practised several types of flexible work programmes, such as teleworking, flexible time and part-time schedules (Gorjifard & Crawford, 2020:68). In the new world of Tourism work, we may not know for sure which jobs will be destroyed and what will be created, but one thing is clear: Everyone, whatever their age, will at some point have to spend time either re-skilling, which is learning new skills to perform multiple tasks or for a new position (Gratton, 2019). Technology is becoming a cornerstone for virtually all innovation and new productivity ideas aim at promoting efficiency, simplicity, and scale, using data as the core for any business industry and or government process. The digital transformation build on data flaws and open internet has created a goldmine of information, with businesses and enterprises, eager to extract any intelligence to finetune their products for services to their targeted customers (Jain, 2022). Thus, Hospitality and Tourism facilitators need to meet and adjust their skills as per the development era demand. This means that the facilitators ability to re-skill or upskill is much needed, with world standard work era 4.0. (Mahmudah et al., 2021). Digital transformation has also given right to the platform economy, power by a flexible, global pool of labour as income and jobs in the traditional labour market decline for a highly educated workforce. Many have turned to low paid and free-lance work. Based on the lessons learnt from Covid -19 pandemic, the type and strength of competences in the Hospitality and Tourism in the new normal will be much higher. The competences perceived for any employee or emerging entrepreneur in Hospitality and Tourism will be agile and keep changing as if we need to programme ourselves to support the recovery of Tourism sustainably (Buheji, 2020).

So, employability becomes very imperative for both policy makers and scholars as it focuses on preparing individuals, low and high skilled, in communities for jobs that do not exist yet, and even for solving challenges that cannot be realized (Peters et al., 2019; Romgens et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the digital transformation process of any business, will not be always rapid or simple. Despite technology companies, democratising access to slew of new and emerging sophisticated digital services, such as machine learning, deep learning and cloud computing, to customer ranging from large corporates to small and medium sized businesses, challenges persist (Jain, 2020). Therefore, employability competence is much more than getting a job, but it extends beyond maintaining that job in difficult and challenging times. There are two main facets of employability that educational and training institutes in the new normal needs to take into account; the ability of graduates, to get a job whether highly skilled individuals or lower-level employees and the ability of graduates to tackle the level of work that is being equipped for the job (Levenson, 2020). Nonetheless, emerging technology have started to contribute to the growing polarity in employment in favour of highly skilled workers (Jain, 2020). Alternatively upskilling which is learning current tasks more deeply with different techniques. Every conceivable job will have new technologies to learn and new personal relationships to navigate as those roles fit and refit into a changing economic landscape (Gratton, 2019). The development era demands the skills of Hospitality and Tourism

facilitators to meet needs and adjust. This means that the facilitators ability to re-skill or upskill is much needed with world-standard work era 4.0. (Mahmudah et al, 2021).

Challenges of Education and Training in the New Norm

In the new norm education and training institutions needs to identify and anticipate the competences that their graduates should possess in order to meet the required competitiveness in the country. These employment competences should reflect the identity of graduates. The challenge is to find ways of integrating learning programmes with very dynamic, repeatedly changing world market and local community conditions (Buheji, 2020). Lack of access to high speed, affordable internet, suboptimal privacy and data security standards, regulatory landscape that hampers rather than enables cross border remote works and lack of preparedness, to upskill the workforce exacerbate the problem (Jain, 2020). Consequently, if there is a mismatch in competencies, and the failure to resolve it, creates a crisis. Considering the devastating effects of Covid -19 pandemic, post covid -19 unemployment is expected to be twice as more than the pre- Covid -19 pandemic. Therefore, regardless of manpower development, unless innovative solutions have resilient competency programmes, are developed and implemented for the new normal as well as its frequent flyer turbulent market (Buheji, 2020). Jain (2020) note that new technology will significantly alter the skill profile of future jobs and workers will have to equipped themselves with the requisite skills to stay relevant in a competitive job market.

Considering the changing customer preference that are completely different from the pre-Covid -19 pandemic experiences, and the ongoing Covid -19 crisis, companies will continue to deal with a business environment that showed with digital only experiences, reconfigured production and supply lines and the fiscal distancing workspace. For instance, lack of proper equipment and technology, inaccessibility to a high-speed internet connection, inappropriate office space at home locations and interference of parental responsibilities with work, such as homeschooling, were among the issues reported by many workers for WFH, especially in the first days or weeks of the pandemic (Gorjifard & Crawford, 2020). Workforce development approaches vary greatly across the sectors with the financial services staying head of the curve in apprenticeship and engaging under representative groups and technology companies acting fast on rolling out online training courses, while consumer products lack behind others. However, in order to address the skills gap, there are several approaches that can be employed by businesses including, employing externally for roles that are specialized and technical, re-skilling existing staff to prepare them for newly created roles (Jain, 2020), or a mix of both but deploying a fluid workforce consisting of temporal and flexible jobs, including skilled contractual workforce for none core functions based on demonstrated competencies.

Companies that have an interest in investing on its future growth needs to provide a levelled playing field and build a Talent pipeline, for jobs of the future. In the short-term people will need to learn to monetize their skills and create unconventional economic opportunities for themselves (Amitabh, 2020). Whilst education is important for many people it is unattainable, or it may not be possible to equipped everyone with the skills required for the current job market. Consequently, a number of people have found ways of educating themselves on a variety of things, ranging from mid-career professionals to those pursuing career track changes to school children, businesspeople, retired experts and many other. Subsequently,

instead of debating whether artificial intelligence will exacerbate job losses in the Covid -19 era, we must figure out how it can augment the productivity of creators and micro entrepreneurs who will be the pillars of the economic rebuilding in the post Corona virus world (Amitabh, 2020). Therefore, learning to augment meaningful creative pursuits, through stories, a new age technology can unleash immeasurable possibilities, for the economy.

Research Methodology

In order to understand the importance of manpower development in Tourism and the need for retraining in the post Covid -19 World a qualitative approach was adopted. The research approach helped in understanding the role of technology and the challenges in upskilling and re-silling of the workforce. Considering the complexity of training programs in Tourism it was important for the study to unravel ways in which lifelong learning can be promoted by tourism businesses and fined ways of including low skilled employees in training and development programs. A qualitative study was chosen because it gave the researchers an opportunity to engage in in-depth interviews with key Tourism stakeholders. The approach was necessary to unpack how training can support sustainable Tourism recovery, promote greener Tourism systems, and assist Tourism businesses transition into the digital age post Covid-19 pandemic. The advantage of using the qualitative approach is that it allowed researchers to visit tourism establishments and training institutions in order to assess, the impact of global technological environment, and how the different stakeholders are responding to such changes, with particular focus on emotional and technological intelligence vis-à-vis job opportunities.

Twelve key informants from industry, academia was interviewed face to face, based on prior schedule telephonic appointments. A semi- structured interview guide was used to gather the data from the participants. Interviews were than transcribed and themed, based on central ideas on the subject matter. Academics in Tourism and Hospitality constituted the majority of the participants. The interview schedule was broken down into two sections, whereby the first part focus on the demographic information and the second part looked at the key issues on manpower development, and the significance of retaining of employees post Covid-19 pandemic. Participants were selected purposefully, based on the researcher's judgment on the characteristics of the population to participate in the study. Participants were chosen based on the researcher's knowledge about the subject under study and the population characteristics. The population size was determined after reaching a saturation level of twelve interviews. In conducting the study non pharmaceutical protocols were observed.

Findings and Discussions

A non-response rate of twenty percent (20 %) was achieved, and the researcher personally administered the interviews, orally with the general managers, departmental managers and the instructors (Vocational Training), Lecturers and Deputy Head of Departments (Namibia Hotel & Tourism School) focusing on Hospitality, Culinary Arts and Tourism Management. Sixteen comma six (16,6%) were Hotel General managers in Industry and were males. Eighty-three comma three percent (83.3%) were Lecturers in Hospitality and tourism Management. Fifty-eight point three (58,3%) of the respondents were males and forty-one point six were (41.6%) were females. Most of the participants had more than ten years of experience in practice, with a minimum of a degree in Tourism and other related qualifications. Most of the respondents indicated that they were recently involved in further training particularly the respondents from the Hotel industry. Contrary, respondent 1, indicated that their company

offers training for their managers called the Shine Leadership Program, which is provided by their own inhouse university, dealing with short courses for employees and is conducted by the training managers. Other training organisations have also started supervisory training with particular focus on empowering women in leadership positions. Respondents were asked about the type of training that they have received. It was evident that there were complex challenges of upskilling and re-skilling of employees, considering the responses given. In some cases, Lean Management training was introduced, which focussed on training the trainer, who would then transfer the skills to their subordinates in the various departments.

Researchers were keen to understand the extent to which lifelong learning is promoted for low-skilled employees. Interestingly most respondents indicated that, on the job training (OJT) was provided to employees in the form of short courses. In selecting the right candidate for training, organisations categorised their employees and screened them, based on the qualifications and the key priority areas that require re-skilling. For academics it was evident that the type of further training that they required had to do with improved lesson delivery. Therefor the lecturers were encouraged to take up post graduate studies focussing on higher education and training. Most lecturers were encouraged to attend workshops and conferences, and in some cases higher education institutions have external staff exchange programs abroad, which has been put in place. This is in line with, (Ekene & Oluoch-Suleh, 2015), who argued that education is a critical tool for the transformation of the individual and the society and the role of the institution of higher learning in reorienting the curriculum for sustainable development which aim at preparing a holistic and value oriented individual for useful living within the society, cannot be over emphasised.

Researchers were also interested to know the measures that have been put in place to support sustainable tourism recovery, promote greener Tourism systems, and transition into the digital age, post Covid -19 pandemic. The majority of participants indicated that Hotels have started to implement water saving and consumption measures, electricity has been replacing where possible with solar systems, waste separation at source, reduction of food waste and costing measures to increase productivity were mentioned. Participants were aware of the impact of rapid change in the global technological environment, therefore Hotels have responded swiftly, by reserving accommodation, for very short lead times, and in academic institutions highbred learning and meetings were introduced. The pandemic, however, has likely exacerbated learning barriers for those who need educational and training the most due to digital skills gaps or limited or no access to online opportunities, equipment, or connectivity to take full advantage of online learning (Islam & Habib, 2021; Mahboubi & Mekkaya, 2021). Furthermore, participants were of the opinion that technology has improved service delivery across sales, customer service and operations in particular. So, the benefits associated with upskilling and re-skilling of employees were related to the better achievement of goals, higher annual returns, greater productivity, and superb skill transfers. Although subsidies to businesses promote participation in lifelong learning, employers normally fail to address the needs of low-skilled employees (Mahboubi & Mekkaya, 2021). The relationship between education and development within this normative dimension should then be to sensitise government, policy makers, institutions of higher learning and individuals, to adopt a human centred approach to development planning. The normative

perspective in development underscores that any development effort of men, women and children should be put at the centre (Ekene & Oluoch-Suleh, 2015).

In order to support sustainable Tourism recovery, Hotels have introduced food waste programs that are meant to measure leftovers on the plate as a strategy to control wastage. As a strategy for saving water hotels have introduced a low flow tap with a sensor in the public areas, and grey water (recycled) have been introduced for the gardens (Respondent 8). In order to save energy, a hybrid approach has been used where solar geysers and boilers have been introduced. To promote greener tourism systems, the Tourism Industry has started to use more and more of Solar power and water systems. They embarked on paperless meetings through the use of technology, thereby reducing carbon footprint. Other establishments have implemented climate change adaptations, in the hotel, growing own vegetables, (Permaculture and Intercropping), Generation gas using kitchen waste as well as saving water by filtering grey water through a mini wetland (Respondents 8).

The focus has shifted towards Re-use, Reduce and Re-cycle. Others have started to focus on product modification, vigorous marketing and price reviews (Respondents 3). Due to the risk caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, Hotels are appealing to the domestic market since the international tourist numbers are dwindling. Technology is the cornerstone of almost all innovation and new ideas aimed at productivity, efficiency, ease and scale, with data at the core of every business, industry, and government process (Manavi, 2020). Rapid change in the global and technological Tourism Environment has forced Hotels to focus more on the Global Distribution Systems (GDS) and Investing in Technology (Islam, 2021b). In order to promote skilled manpower development in emotional and technological intelligence to fix the exiting job opportunities, Hotels have started implementing mental health education and counselling by HR and providing, one on one sessions with the Employees (Al- Qalhathi et al., 2020; Hossain et al., 2018). In order to accelerate the adoption of digital technologies and digital offering in the Tourism Industry, wireless network have been installed and funding for internet resources have been increased. For academic institution, they have embraced the use of E- Learning platforms such as MS Teams, Zoom, What's App to promote blended learning. The findings are in line with a number of studies that have indicated that relevant education, can lead to improvements in self-confidence, self-efficacy, competency, communication skills and civic engagement, a sense of belonging to a social group and substantive freedom and capability (Ekene & Oluoch-Suleh, 2015). Organisations have used new approaches to respond to the change in employment conditions by multiskilling employees at all levels and exposing their employees to other departments. As alluded to the above, employees have been told to communicate effectively in order to respond effectively to uncertainty.

Hotels have also put in place training programs that encourage innovative thinking. Thus, they have discovered new methods of training that focus on guest retention strategy (Respondent 1). However, academics were of the opinion that they were not adequately prepared to respond to the change in employment scenarios, since there was limited training, and lack of financial support blended learning (Respondent 5). For instance (Ekene & Oluoch-Suleh, 2015) assert that education does not only improve the individual choices available to men, but that an educated population provide the type of labour force necessary for industrial development and economic growth. In order to support the development of relevant competencies and

skills during transformation in the labour market, new trends that has emerged include the use of social media, job adverts on social media, and the use of celebrities (Networking) for image purposes. Therefore, governments need to pursue a comprehensive adult education and training strategy centred around public and private sector collaboration to identify skills needs and barriers, and to support the development and implementation of strategies to ensure the strategy's effectiveness (Mahboubi & Mekkaya, 2021). To encourage cooperation and creativity in responding to challenging times, participants emphasised on enhancing team cohesion, promoting problem solving and developing cost saving measures. However, organisations need to start sharing ICT Technologies, institutions such as universities, government and business needs to combine efforts to upskill labour in order to get ready for the 4th industrial revolution.

The inclusion of ICT in continuous professional development of Tourism employees will play a significant role in the adaptation into a new digital transformation age, if innovative and sustainable approaches are adopted. Despite the criticism of the human capital theory at the individual level on the extent to which education is directly related to improvements in occupations or income, human capital theorist general assume that after all the non-input into the economic growth have been explained, much of the unexplained residual variance, represent the contribution of the improvement of human capital, of which education is seen as most important (Ekene & Oluoch-Suleh, 2015). Therefor ICT education can enhance digitisation, increase accessibility to information and improve information, dissemination and create new ways of doing business by adopting smart technologies in Tourism. Even though there are a number of available training programmes for skilling and re-skilling of employees, Tourism business still face a number of challenges. Evidence shows that businesses play a central role in providing training to their employees, but they invest less in low-skilled employees because of lower returns (Mahboubi & Mekkaya 2021). Priority for training and retraining is usually given to highly skilled staff at the expense of those who have low skills.

Conclusion

This research has contributed to the discourse on manpower development in Tourism and the importance of retraining employees to remain relevant in the post Covid -19 world by providing new evidence on sustainable Tourism recovery, green Tourism systems and training and re-skilling of employees in order to achieve greater organisation performance and work life balance. There are a number of benefits associated with upskilling and re-skilling of employees which vary from inclusive growth to reduction on unemployment benefit dependents. The paper has demonstrated that re-skilling of employees to be lifelong learners and critical thinkers will ultimately benefit the organisations and help employees in their self-growth.

The paper explored new trends on training that would support the development of competencies and skills in the labour market. The integration of different approaches in preparing employees during the new normal was found to be an integral part in preparing them to respond to the changing employment scenarios in times of uncertainties, transformations, and challenges. Whilst the pandemic had devastating effects on the Tourism sector, it has accelerated the adoption of digital technologies and digital offering. For organisations and institutions to adapt to the new world order skilling and re-skilling of employees is mandatory in Tourism.

Higher education Institutions have to put priority in preparing their staff, on the use of ICT, in order for them to navigate into the future. Tourism organisations and institutions should promote sustainable tourism recovery by adopting smart technologies and invest in manpower development with particular focus on emotional and technological intelligence in order to address the existing job opportunities. Institutions and Tourism organisations should identify and develop relevant competencies and skills required in the labour market during the transformation age. The paper concludes that cooperation and creativity, continuous professional development and IT have to change the Tourism business and help other sectors to adapt and enter into a new digital transformation age.

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