

Expatriate Hotel General Managers in Jamaica: Perceptions of Human Resource, Organizational, and Operational Challenges

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Abstract

International hotel companies employ expatriates all over the world as general managers to help professionalize the hospitality industry. Yet, there is very little research on expatriate management in the Caribbean. The present exploratory study was undertaken to research expatriate managers' perceptions of managing on the island of Jamaica. Nine expatriate general managers from four and five star hotels were interviewed. Punctuality, educational levels, productivity, and low skill levels were seen as key human resource challenges. Crime, bureaucratic red tape, and shortage of materials were seen as impacting the organizations' operations. Expatriates adjustment to the Jamaican culture and maintaining standards were seen as key factors for success.

Keywords: Expatriate general managers; Jamaican managers; Four and five star hotels; Foreign managers

Introduction

The competitive global business environment makes expatriate assignments a necessary but risky proposition [1]. There is a competitive advantage to be gained from expatriate managers who manage organizations effectively. Ozdemir, Cizel [2] and Harvey [3] contended that only global organizations that staff key positions with skilled expatriate manager can attain success in the globalized marketplace.

Hotel companies operating internationally employ overseas managers for three main reasons: 1. To provide an element of control and coordination in the local operating unit, 2. To provide management development opportunities to senior staff in the organization, and 3. To facilitate the transfer of skills and knowledge across global borders [2]. Expatriate managers are conceptualized as those who are not nationals of the country where they are working, but they are employed because of their specialized operational abilities or due to their knowledge of the employing organization [4]. When expatriate managers are assigned to a host country, they are coming into a new business and cultural environment. Adaptation to the new cultural environment in the host country is perceived as a major challenge expatriates face on their international assignments and may lead to ineffectiveness or even business failure [5].

Extant research has focused on cross-cultural adaptation, expatriate success and failures, and expatriate job satisfaction [1,5-9]. Few studies have examined general issues/challenges facing expatriates [10-12]. Specifically, only one study by Jayawardena and Haywood [12] attempted to study expatriate hotel managers in a Caribbean context. Hence, addressing such a topic warrants additional analysis.

Jamaica is the third largest of the Caribbean islands and the largest English speaking island. According to the Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) (2009) tourism is the number one foreign exchange earner for the island, accounting for over 47% of the estimated earnings of \$2 billion in American currency in 2009 from a total of 2.75 million visitors. In 2009, there were approximately 2070 hotels and lodging accommodations providing over 30,000 rooms (JTB, 2009). The industry employs more than 80,000 people directly and 180,000 indirectly (JTB, 2009).

The present study analyzed perceptions of expatriate hotel general

managers in Jamaica towards human resource, operational, and organizational issues they face. Implications for the future development of human resources in Jamaica and international managers who consider an assignment in Jamaica will be examined. The study explores the following research questions:

1. How do expatriate managers perceive human resource issues in Jamaica?
2. What are the organizational and operational challenges expatriate managers perceive, which affect hotel operations?
3. What do expatriate managers believe are the characteristics necessary to be successful in Jamaica?

Literature Review

Expatriate assignments

As international corporate activities increase, staffing of their organizations involves more strategic concerns. As international companies create more overseas assignments, differences between expatriate assignments and traditional assignments become more apparent. Dissatisfaction with the host country can impact expatriate failure [13]. Working in a foreign environment with different political, cultural, and economic characteristics, expatriates are faced with job-related and personal problems [7]. Also, it can be an expensive undertaking to send senior business executives overseas. Research suggests that approximately 40% of individuals who undertake an expatriate assignment fail, at a cost to their employer of two to four times their annual salary [14]. Cross-industry studies have estimated American expatriate failure at between 25 and 40% when the expatriate

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is assigned to a developed country and about 70% when the expatriate is assigned to a developing country [9]. Avril and Magnini [15] indicated that in the hotel industry, a large portion of expatriate manager assignments end in failure.

Expatriate failure or “turnover” occurs when managers either quit or return to their home country prior to the completion of their overseas tour [16]. The top six reasons for expatriate failures include: (1) expatriates inability to adapt to the new environment, (2) not achieving family acceptance and assimilation, (3) lack of support from the head office, (4) not having an open mindset, (5) lack of willingness to learn, and (6) expatriate lack of technical competence [17]. Expatriates are said to be successful when they meet a firms’ objectives and maintain management standards at an overseas property for the duration of their assignment [16]. Successful international managers exhibit the following characteristics: adaptability, flexibility, open-mindedness, cross-functional flexibility, sociability, cultural sensitivity, consideration for others, visionary and strategic thinking, leadership skills, and non-authoritarian control [9,12,18,19]. Yooyanyong and Muenjohn [20] described expatriates leadership as one of the major factors which contribute to the success of an expatriate and that it should be considered a global competency. Expatriate managers also seem to experience success when they have pro-active attitudes, energy, drive, and determination [8]. Ozdemir and Cizel [2] identified a list of skills for an effective expatriate manager: able to develop and use global strategic skills, deal with change and transition, cope with cultural diversity, handle flexible organizational structures, work with others and in teams, and communicate transfer knowledge. Cross cultural training provided to expatriates is critical for success [21]. Research by Idress, et al. [22] used the company Habib Rafiq Limited as an example by indicating that they do pre-departure training as well as a program for support during the assignment and engage in family training. However, one recent study by Chien [18] indicated that the needs of expatriates regarding training were significantly higher than the training provided by their companies.

Expatriate and societal challenges

Many challenges impact expatriate management success in Jamaica. Political and economic ideology includes economic conditions, social demographics such as the local business environment, rules and regulations, and government policies [23]. Research has shown that differences in the political, social, and economic systems between the home country and the host country also affect expatriates [24,25]. Research by Miao, et al. [26] suggested that challenges faced by expatriate managers in China were related more to a wide list of stakeholders rather than simply cross-cultural issues.

The impact of acculturation should not be underestimated. Different expectations in an unfamiliar culture can make a manager’s leadership and communication styles obsolete [19]. Hogan and Goodson [19] also posited that expatriates must be adept with new situational demands; indicating the need for flexibility in leadership and communication styles for managerial effectiveness. “Expatriate success requires that managers not only understand the unfamiliar culture but use that knowledge to adapt their leadership and communication practices to the particular company, employees, and environment”. Expatriate general managers acculturate to the host community by navigating what is referred to as the task environment, which includes employees, government agencies, owners, and suppliers [26]. Lewis [14] further highlighted the Global Personality Inventory (GPI) which contains data gathered by Personnel Decisions International (PDI) from more

than 12,000 managers and executives who experienced its leadership screening process across the globe. As suggested, the chief cause of a high failure rate for expatriate assignments is the inability of managers to appreciate differences between their own business cultures and foreign work environments. Challenges often arise because of personal perceptions rather than substantive business issues. Acquiring knowledge and the skills of doing business in a host country were viewed as highly needed skills by expatriates [18].

Culture and the caribbean context

The Caribbean has always attracted foreigners, from millions of tourists to international managers to myriads of hotel managers. International hotel corporations employ expatriate general managers to help professionalize the hospitality management and the industry in the Caribbean [12]. An international manager in the Caribbean faces challenges which vary by destination, depending on the historic past and ethnic mix of that country. For example, Jamaica is comprised mainly of descendants of African slaves, while Guyanais comprised predominantly of descendants of indentured laborers from East India. Even though the Caribbean people are known for their warmth and charm, which forms an important part of the tourism product, employees and host communities may react differently in the levels of hospitality, quality of service, and dealings with expatriate hotel managers [12].

Jayawardena and Haywood [12] also posited that various factors influence the behavioral patterns of host society, their attitudes towards tourists and hospitality. These factors include the political landscape, percentage of single parent families, drug trafficking, literacy rates, and crime. Jamaica, for example, has one of the lowest adult literacy rates in the Caribbean at 86% [27]. In terms of crime, Jamaica has been known to have a culture based on crime. The country has suffered a high crime rate since the 1970’s, with especially high rates of murder, household robbery, exports of illegal drugs, and harassment of tourist visitors by hustlers, drug dealers, and prostitutes. The Foreign Investment Advisory Service in 2004 indicated that crime and security concerns seriously impair Jamaica’s attractiveness to foreign investors. Jayawardena and Haywood [12] also identified poor environmental management systems, poor return on investment, high foreign exchange leakage, low productivity levels, red tape delays, inconsistent quality and high prices of local produce, and attracting and retaining good employees as potential challenges for expatriates in the Caribbean.

Studies have shown that culture plays a role and influences all facets of life in a country, including business practices [23]. “Culture” encompasses a set of implicit, widely shared beliefs, traditions, values, and expectations that characterizes a particular group of people. It identifies the uniqueness of the social unit, its values, and beliefs [28]. Tayeb [29] suggested that culture is important, primarily due to three reasons. First, it recognizes the differences in cultural norms, values, and attitude from one society to another. People’s thinking is likely shaped by what is considered appropriate behavior within that society. Second, different cultural groups behave differently under similar circumstances because of the differences in their underlying values and attitudes. Third, culture plays a major part in shaping social institutions, work organizations, managerial behavior, and personnel policies.

Tourism and jamaican workers

The tourism industry has the potential to provide sustained economic growth for Jamaica according to HEART Trust NTA [30]. Expatriates should understand the human resources that they

manage in Jamaican hotels and understand the differences that may impact how they manage [31]. Some challenges facing the Caribbean, including Jamaica include the issues of alienation, absenteeism and low productivity, need for more training, poor service levels, and finding the right people for the job [32,33]. Studies by Carter conducted in 1997 showed that 48% of hotel workers admitted that they were not exerting their best efforts, indicating a vast amount of untapped potential and lost productivity. The Foreign Investment Advisory Service [34] indicated that the availability of both skilled and unskilled workers in Jamaica was low.

A study conducted about hotel employees in 2002 by the Jamaican national training agency, HEART Trust NTA, postulated that hotel industry employees had weaknesses in communication, human relations skills, personal hygiene, service skills, safety skills, and security procedures. Employees had only an average rating regarding personal characteristics. Similarly, workplace success skills were rated poor to good, with punctuality rated very poor and attitude toward work as good. The HEART study [30] also indicated that employers saw deficiencies in work ethic, punctuality, and basic knowledge in accountability and personal responsibility. These findings present a challenge to expatriates, especially for those from countries where these standards are higher.

Hospitality and tourism education and training

A study commissioned by the Caribbean Tourism organization on the status of tourism and education in the Caribbean found that education in tourism at the primary and secondary school was lacking in the region [35]. Moreover, most teachers at those levels had little or no training in teaching tourism. More tourism education is needed in the region due to the importance of the sector as well as to help mould attitudes, and perceptions as negative views of tourism persist. Charles [35] indicated that “most countries either have a hotel school or hospitality department in a community college, offering certificates and courses, to universities which offer bachelors or post graduate degrees”. The HEART Trust [30] indicated that training facilities for the industry were lacking.

Research Methodology

Sample

Jamaica was chosen for the site of research because it had one of the largest collections of four-star and five-star properties in the Caribbean. The Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association was contacted and it provided the researcher a list of 4-star and 5-star hotels employing expatriate general managers. Four-star and five-star properties were selected as the basis of the research because most of them are managed by expatriates. Snowball sampling was used to identify other hotels that had expatriate general managers. For this procedure, existing study participants recommended future participants from among their acquaintances [36]. In total, 19 general managers were sent emails asking if they wanted to participate in the research. Nine general managers responded and agreed to participate. All the participants represented four-star and five-star properties in Negril and in Montego Bay, Jamaica.

Data collection

Data was collected for the study using face-to face in-depth semi-structured interviews. A qualitative technique was considered suitable for a study of this nature since the focus of qualitative research is on participants' perceptions and experiences [37]. For the study, the goal

was for expatriates to share openly their experiences as hotel general managers while working an international assignment at a Jamaican hotel. The research used a pre-designed interview protocol to elicit responses. Interviews lasted between one hour and two hours/fifteen minutes. Each interview took place in the general manager's office at each hotel. Interviews were conducted between May 17 and June 6, 2010. General Managers were asked for permission to record the interviews and all but one agreed. Interviews were recorded to provide accuracy for data analysis.

Interview protocol

The interview protocol that guided the process was developed based on review of the literature which included research by Jayawardena and Haywood [12]. Their conceptual study was the only study which presented an assessment of the potential factors inherent in the Caribbean that may impact expatriates assigned there. The interview protocol was semi-structured and was comprised of three major sets of questions. The first set included demographics, such as countries where each manager had previously worked and their educational background. The second set of questions was related to human resource factors, such as punctuality of employees, employee service levels, turnover rates, and level of education. Probing questions were used to elicit deeper understanding or to gain additional information. Managers were asked how these issues affected service quality as defined by the level and quality of services employees provided and how they were evaluated by guests. Service quality was considered a measure of how well the service level delivered consistently matched customer expectations [38]. The third set of questions used probing questions and sought to identify organizational and operational challenges faced by managers, such as inflation, exchange rates, and shortage of materials. The nine general managers who participated were from France, the United States, Greece, Belgium, Scotland, and Austria. All of the general managers had worked in the Jamaican hotel industry for a period of three months to twenty years. Each one had been a general manager from three to fifteen years.

Data analysis

All recorded interviews were transcribed after all interviews were completed. The data was assessed for applicable themes and assigned labels to major categories and subcategories where necessary. Those that had subcategories were assigned codes to show its relationship with a broader concept. Because questions were deduced from the literature and concerned with gathering information on specific phenomenon, some questions were closed ended and assigned values. A study using similar methodology was conducted by Miao et al. [26].

A data driven approach to coding was utilized, allowing the author to “stay as close to the data as possible and interpret the meaning of the data from within the words” [39]. When managers were asked questions, they were allowed a certain amount of flexibility in approaching the answers. In certain cases, new avenues for questions were explored based on general manager comments. Numbers from 1 through 9 were assigned to participating general managers to protect the confidentiality of respondents. Consequently, neither the names of the general managers nor their hotels was identified. Results and findings follow using actual respondents' quotes to clarify and amplify.

Validation of the study was established by means of member checking. The manuscript with the themes and quotes was sent to the interviewees for verification and comments, allowing key respondents to read the recorded data and make comments. Member checking is

a frequently used approach to determine the validity in qualitative research [40]. In all cases, the interviewees reported that their answers were what they had intended to transmit. Reliability has limited meaning and plays a minor role in qualitative research; it relates primarily to the reliability of multiple coders on a team to agree on codes for the passages in the text [40]. Therefore, no test for reliability was undertaken for the present study as a single coder was used due primarily to the small number of questions and participants.

Findings and Discussion

The research identified salient information that may impact expatriate hotel managers in Jamaica and which also could have implications for Jamaica as an expanding hospitality market. Some issues experienced by the expatriate managers were unique and dependent upon the organizational culture, location, management style, and other factors.

The demographic characteristics of the participating general managers are listed in Table 1. The number of years they worked as a general manager overall as well as the number of years working in Jamaica, their country of origin, and whether they had worked in the Caribbean previously are included as well.

Perceptions of human resource challenges

Level of hospitality: All nine managers indicated that Jamaican hotel employees were extremely hospitable compared to other places where they had worked in the past. As a result, working with them was relatively easy. They also believed that guests continued to return to Jamaica because of the natural friendliness and genuine warmth of the Jamaican people; although it was noted by two of the managers that friendliness alone does not mean true hospitality and some employees lacked the service aspect of hospitality. The following quotes provide examples of some of the comments:

“Jamaican workers are the best I have seen when it comes to hospitality”. (GM#1)

“I have seen many hotels and the level of hospitality here is far higher than any other country”. (GM#6)

Service quality: While Jamaicans are extremely friendly and willing to work and give their best, Jamaican hotel workers seem to lack the level of service quality needed in the industry when compared to other more developed countries. The managers agreed that service quality is higher compared to other Caribbean countries, but it is definitely lacking when compared to more developed countries. Such a sentiment was expressed by 7 out of the 9 managers. One manager believed the service level was average, while the other did not believe it was lower. The following comments echoed these observations:

“Many of the people here are not professional. Because of that, I believe that the service quality here is lower than other places”. (GM#4)

“I think service is lower here. People are all friendly but they are not service oriented, all friendly, all smileys, and all good buddies”. (GM#8)

Most of the managers attributed lower service levels to the low level of education and basic training as well as the poor skills set and socio-economic conditions. Others contended that as a result of the culture and the friendliness of the people, people take more time. They enjoy socializing with guests and other staff members which impedes their work. Other issue determined by the expatriate manager’s concerned inconsistencies in service quality. For example, a particular task is done today one way and tomorrow that task is done differently.

Skill levels and education: An interesting finding relates to the skill levels of Jamaican hotel workers. The managers all agreed that Jamaicans need to be more prepared for the industry because they lacked vital skills. Most training conducted by the hotels was for basic skill sets. Additionally, managers believed that the hospitality training given in Jamaica is inadequate even for those earning higher levels of qualification. Furthermore, they stated that there is a lack of opportunities and infrastructure to provide necessary training. The following comments relate to this finding:

“In Jamaica and the Caribbean, we need to prepare people more, way more training is needed”. (GM#2)

“There are some very talented people here in the area of entertainment and sports but when it comes down to hotels, it is not so easy to find a Jamaican who is a great chef. It comes down to poor education”. (GM#6)

Respondents indicated that the level of education of hotels workers was very low compared to other places where they have worked. Many managers indicated that they have numerous workers in the hotels who cannot read and write and who lack basic educational skills. However, they indicated that this did not prevent them from hiring these individuals for lower positions, such as stewarding and gardening. On the other hand, lack of education has prevented many who may have the capabilities to do well from being successful because of their inability to pass some basic hotel entry tests. The following comments related to this topic:

“Education is less here in Jamaica and the Caribbean. We had a job fair and saw 900 people. We had lots of people that didn’t even know how to speak English. If people had the opportunity to go to school, they would do well”. (GM#2)

“The level of education here is less, but this is a people business so

Respondents	Country of Origin	# of Years in Jamaica	# of Years as GM	# of Years with This Hotel	Previous Work Experience in the Caribbean
Manager #1	USA	2.5	7	2.5	Yes
Manager #2	France	6	9	5.5	Yes
Manager #3	Greece	20	6	7 mo.	Yes
Manager #4	Austria	4.5	15	11	Yes
Manager #5	Belgium	6 mo.	3	8 mo.	No
Manager #6	Scotland	1.5	12	1.5	Yes
Manager #7	Austria	22	4	14	No
Manager #8	Austria	3 mo.	6	3 mo.	No
Manager #9	USA	2 mo.	10	4.5	Yes

Table1: Expatriate demographic characteristics.

it's not of huge importance and it depends on what you are hiring them for". (GM#9)

"The people lack the basic level of education which is why we have to offer some basic reading and writing skills. We have people who don't know how to write their names". (GM#8)

Productivity: One important issue that was identified by the general managers was the low productivity of Jamaican workers when compared to workers in other cultures. A total of eight out of the nine managers identified this issue, while one manager believed it was comparable. However, that particular manager was operating one of the newer hotels on the island and this may have had an impact on his response. The comments below indicate this assessment:

"As a culture, there is conformity to mediocrity. The work ethic is not as acute as it should be. In fact, the plague if you will in the Jamaican workforce is that those that are in fact qualified go abroad". (GM#3)

"Unfortunately, productivity levels are very low here. Maybe it comes back to the skills. I don't think it has anything to do with laziness". (GM #7)

Attracting qualified employees: Another prominent finding was difficulty in attracting quality employees. Managers believe that because of low salaries in the industry and because most of the good employees are leaving for overseas, as well as the low education levels in the society, it is challenging to get good people. The following comments are representative:

"Ten to fifteen years ago, there was an abundance of good quality people. But with the amount of hotels now on the island and the amount of good people who have left to go overseas, there is actually a shortage of good quality people to go around". (GM#6)

"It is a challenge today because the demand is higher than the supply of good quality employees". (GM#7)

"Getting the right people for the right positions is difficult. When I needed a food service manager I interviewed 16 people and we selected 3". (GM# 2)

Turnover: There were mixed results regarding to respondents' perceptions of turnover. Four of the managers indicated that they had higher turnover at their properties than at other places, while another four thought it was similar to other places where they had worked. Only one manager indicated that turnover was lower. Managers indicated that people are looking for more opportunity elsewhere. Others expressed the ease of terminating employees in Jamaica compared to other places because of such factors as the lack of unions and less restrictive labor. Turnover seemed to be based on location of the hotel, educational levels of employees, age, and length of time with the company. The following quotes expressed these sentiments:

"I think turnover is higher here, but it also depends on the level of employee. I find that middle age to older employees is more settled". (GM#7)

"Here in Jamaica it is easier to discipline and terminate staff than in any other Caribbean countries where I have worked. I would say turnover here is less because people need the jobs". (GM#6)

"I would say it's lower because, in this particular hotel, most of the people are from communities where there is not much industry". (GM#5)

Punctuality: One of the most prominent issues was respondents' perceptions of punctuality. All nine managers contended that punctuality was a serious issue among hotel workers. While all the hotels have policies in place to deal with timeliness, it was seen as very disrespectful regarding operations. Managers contended that they believe it is a cultural issue, but it should not be tolerated. The following comments expressed these sentiments:

"They have a "soon come attitude", it seems normal to be late. I think it's a part of the culture". (GM#4)

"8:00 means 9:15...it drives me crazy. I can't handle it. Time is money and money is time. My assistant cannot get here to save her soul". (GM#1)

"This is a challenge which I find from the top to the bottom. It is outrageous how people have no respect for time. I find it very disrespectful to others". (GM#7)

Perceptions of organizational and operational challenges

Crime: Jamaica has been plagued by increased crime over the past several years. Many of the respondents indicated that crime and security were major concerns for their operations, especially for hotels located in areas such as Montego Bay. It not only has impacted employees, but some expatriates have expressed fear for their personal lives. Below are the comments:

"Crime definitely affects the workforce. A good amount of employees come from communities known to be a crime infested. This makes it more difficult when you are scheduling, in particular female staff for the evening shift". (GM#7)

"We have a much bigger security staff than what I would normally have in the States. A couple of people have had a hard time getting to work because of safety issues". (GM#9)

Inconsistency from local suppliers of produce: A very challenging problem the respondents discussed was the serious inconsistencies concerning local produce. All nine managers indicated that this had an effect on their operations regarding the provision of consistent quality and standards for their hotel foodservice operations. Outlined below are some of the comments:

"Inconsistency with produce affects us because we want to promote and support the local agriculture industry, but they have to be able to support 10,000 meals a day". (GM#3)

"During the dry season, fruits are not as sweet and not as juicy. Inconsistency in quality of the meats is a problem because sometimes they are tough, stringy and size varies". (GM#6)

"Everything is a challenge! We could take a handful of seeds and throw them out the window and they will grow and are ready in weeks, yet we import everything". (GM#1)

Bureaucracy and red tape: Seven out of nine respondents identified bureaucracy and red tape as a challenge on the island. The other two managers indicated that it had some impact on their operations. Managers were concerned about the time it took to get some tasks accomplished, and the amount of paperwork, and corruption. Below are some of the sentiments shared:

"Bureaucracy one of the biggest plagues in Jamaica. The bureaucracy is consuming during the process. Often to get the right results, there are allowances for bribery, etc". (GM#3)

“If you come from a country such as Jamaica you are familiar with it. If you know the way to get things done, then you can make it”. (GM#8)

Inflation and exchange rates: All managers indicated that their businesses are impacted by the high inflation rates. This is especially true with imports and salaries as well as high taxes that are levied as a result. The following comments relate to inflation and exchange rate:

“The employees are subjected to this as the country’s economic situation fluctuates. For example, as the price of rice goes up, I have to raise salaries, which means I have to raise my prices for the rooms because we are here to make money”. (GM#3)

“We are an international hotel company which charges. US dollars and pays bills in Jamaican dollars, so we are affected by fluctuations in exchange rates”. (GM#8)

Shortage of materials: Shortages of materials also were seen as a constraint by eight of the expatriate managers. They believed the shortages; especially for local produce, were a sore point. They also indicated the need to constantly import items not available, affecting costs. The following quotes reflect these comments:

“We can buy what we want, but we have to buy things at a much higher price because it has to be imported at higher duties”. (GM#5)

“A huge issue is not just shortages but the quality. I never get what I need. The suppliers don’t tell you they are sorry when they give you 90 instead of your order”. (GM#7)

Perceptions of key success strategies for expatriates

One of the objectives of the present study was to ascertain the factors that expatriates believed were necessary for a successful international manager in Jamaica. Managers agreed that for international managers to be successful in Jamaica, they needed to be flexible, open, and able to adjust to and appreciate the culture of Jamaica. They also should be adaptable, patient, willing to maintain the culture, be firm as well as fair, have a good sense of humor, respect people and not be overly authoritative, and be well educated. The opportunity to develop Jamaican employees, working with warm friendly people, making a difference in people’s lives, appreciating the culture and climate, and helping to define and set hospitality standards were what they liked most about managing in Jamaica. Below are some of the managers’ comments:

“You have to be adaptable to the culture. You have to be patient because sometimes people are slow to react and because of the lack of consistency. You have to show some patience but, at the same time, you have to ensure standards”. (GM#2)

“You need to be flexible, open, be able to adjust and appreciate their culture. Your ego can’t be too big because you need to show them respect but not vice versa”. (GM#5)

“You need to have a passion for the job and a great sense for human resources”. (GM#7)

“Persistence is important and you should be adaptable without losing focus. When you work in the Caribbean, in a country with unskilled labor, or not much professionalism, you will get there eventually. But you definitely have to have persistence”. (GM#8)

“You have to be culturally sensitive, i.e., understand that they you are here visiting and not here to colonize and invade”. (GM#3)

Conclusions and Implications

To a large extent hotel general managers are responsible for the success or failure of their operations. The aim of the present research was to as certain factors faced by expatriate general managers which could affect their ability to run successful hotel operations. An understanding of these factors is essential for successful expatriate managers to cope with the challenges they face operating in a different culture. In the present case, a Caribbean context was the focus. These findings are important to the hotel industry in Jamaica in order to view weaknesses and to expend more effort in those areas vital for competitiveness. The issues found in the study were similar to other studies done in such places like China, Indonesia, and Russia [11,26,41,42]. Key human resource issues concerned education, training, motivation, productivity, punctuality, and service quality. Expatriate managers indicated that governmental bureaucracy, sourcing of adequate and quality produce, and importing of hotel supplies and equipment all impeded successful operations. Similar challenges were identified by expatriate management studies in China [26,10]. Apparently, issues faced by manager’s fall into two categories: those controllable by the managers such as, punctuality and training, and those outside the direct control of the manager, such as, bureaucracy and crime and local supply issues.

Implications for human resource management

One major finding relates to the fact that Jamaican hotel workers were seen as extremely friendly and hospitable compared to workers in other countries. However, the general managers questioned their ability to deliver high levels of quality service. Skills of the workers were deemed as very poor. Expatriates attributed this to the lack of quality training in hospitality and tourism as well as the educational system. Therefore, service quality and productivity levels are affected negatively. Service quality is considered to be a measure of how well the service level delivered matches customer expectations [38]. The authors also cited Lewis and Booms (1983) who indicated that delivering quality service means conforming to customer expectations on a consistent basis. One example of foreign firms utilizing new training to meet customer expectations was in China where service workers were taught specifics about smiles, handshakes, eye contact, and basic hygiene as well as standard job- related tasks [41]. However one downside of upgrading employees was noted by Houdard [43] who used an example from Shangri-La Hotels. In an effort to retain its employees, they trained them in English skills, service orientation, personal hygiene, and proper hotel etiquette. However, once this was completed, the employees became more attractive to other foreign firms in China and the employees were recruited to higher paying jobs with other companies. Shangri-La was, however, able to keep turnover to respectable levels by providing quality employee housing near the hotel and providing career advancement opportunities [44].

Governments and agencies need to assess the current training institutions that prepare graduates and provide more training and educational opportunities for industry workers. An effective partnership between the hotels, universities, and government agencies responsible for training may need to be created so the best human resource products can be created based on identified needs. In an article by Silvera [45] in 2011, Dr. Avinash Persaud was quoted as lamenting the critical need to lift service quality in the Caribbean to international standards. Delivering service quality means conforming to expectations consistently and hotels may have to enforce standards

on a continuous basis. They may need to do more in the benchmarking of service expectations and have consistent evaluation to ensure targets are met. This could entail development of new training programs which emphasizes to workers how service quality directly affects the bottom line. In addition, more mystery shoppers and guest feedback could be utilized to monitor training effectiveness. In a bid to insure standardization, workers in China were shown to understand a conforming product and what constituted a defective one or what could go wrong in the service process [41]. Such consistency can be linked to training of workers in the hospitality and tourism industry.

Poor productivity which was identified as an issue can be attributed not only to the skills and training level but worker motivational levels too. One strategy that hotels in Jamaica could employ could be an analysis of employee attitudes through surveys or focus groups. This would help hotels understand factors which contribute and detract from worker motivational levels. International managers in Russia have used extensive training and developmental programs, along with employee empowerment strategies to impact poor employee service levels and improve productivity [11].

The study found the issue of attracting and retaining employees as a major concern. Managers noted that as a result of the poor skill levels in certain areas, such as food and beverage and culinary, supply did not meet the demand. This was also due to the proliferation of new hotels and workers going overseas in addition to low salary levels offered by hotels in Jamaica. One successful strategy utilized by expatriates in Indonesia made substantial use of non-monetary rewards. Having a deeper knowledge of the culture also allowed these expatriates to institute appropriate changes [42]. Another example of a similar successful strategy was shown in the research of Bruton et al. [41] who indicated that foreign firms who operated in less developed countries gave non-monetary compensation, such as trips to overseas destinations. This was seen to be an effective motivator for building commitment to the organization. The expatriate general managers indicated that socio-economic issues such literacy rates and economic problems and the lack of opportunities in Jamaica compared to other countries also had a substantial impact on workers. Organizations may need to provide more attractive and competitive salaries and benefits to entice individuals to remain in the industry as opposed to seeing employees as expendable. One study indicated that higher wages was ranked as the number one motivational factor for Caribbean hotel workers [46]. Moreover, in a study to understand why workers do not work conducted by Carter in 1997, 64.4% of tourism workers were dissatisfied with their pay. Hotel workers also indicated that, for them to be more productive and satisfied; better pay was most needed among various factors [35].

Educational levels were seen as extremely low compared to other countries, affecting productivity. While managers indicated that this is a people business and that they could use individuals with very poor educational levels in certain areas of the hotel, much more needs to be done in the country regarding education. Jamaica has one of the lowest literacy rates in the Caribbean which impacts hotel performance and is a liability for a country that is attempting to develop its tourism. Therefore, the country needs to focus on education at all levels, especially for vocational training. Larger hotel companies could work with smaller companies to develop hospitality training institutes to better educate their workforce. The initial investment would be offset by a decrease in future turnover and increase in productivity.

One striking similarity mentioned by all the expatriate managers was the lack of punctuality of Jamaican hotel workers compared to hotel workers in other countries. While acknowledged as a cultural problem, it directly affects productivity and morale. A similar problem was shown in research concerning China. Yu and Huart [10] (1995) noted that service is an attitude and inseparable from the cultural environment of the society. Therefore, the attitude of service must be instilled in the people of a country through joint training between the government and hotels. Hence, hotels must improve their training and disciplinary procedures to ensure conformity to punctuality and standards of operation. For example, using appropriate clock-in/clock-out procedures may be a form of discipline while, at the same time, a form of motivation to be punctual. Alternatively, providing incentives tied to performance relating to punctuality assist enforcement of behavior. Positive reinforcement is known to foster desired behavior in individuals.

Organizational and operational implications

Various organizational and operational issues expressed by expatriate managers also were seen as important issues. Expatriate general managers identified the level of crime as impacting their operations, especially those located in Montego Bay. They indicated that at times, employees found it challenging to get to and from work, causing the need at times to provide accommodations for workers. If employees do not feel safe and secure, their productivity in the workplace is affected. While the government has tried to curb crime, major challenges continue to be faced. There is no easy solution to this nationwide problem. However, hotels must continue to see how they can assist workers who are affected by a lack of safety and security. This can be accomplished by expanding programs designed for workers on later shifts by providing or subsidizing safe transportation to and from work. Hotels can work with local police departments to develop systems designed to help escort workers to their homes once they get off buses or other transportation.

The challenge of inconsistency in quality from suppliers of local produce was considered problematic by most expatriate general managers. While the government is trying to ensure that the local economy survives, there must be a concerted effort to aid suppliers so they can meet hotel standards and specifications. Also the government may need to seriously consider waivers for local produce where there are severe shortages; then hotels may be able to provide consistent quality to guests. The government could develop programs with local farmers specifically designed to encourage them to produce foods which meet the international standards needed by the 4-star and 5-star hotels. This was similar to a study conducted in China where expatriate general managers noted inconsistencies in standards and delivery of products as well the bureaucracy [26].

As another finding of the study, bureaucratic inefficiencies impacted business operations. While most of this is inherent in the political system of the country, agencies may look at ways to ameliorate some of the bureaucratic red tape. Many agencies continue to operate in an obsolete way; however, with the advancement in information communication technology, many agencies can improve their operations. Corruption was seen as one of the root causes and agencies need to look at hiring practices and conduct frequent audits to increase the effectiveness of operations. Expatriate General Managers could develop subcommittees through the Jamaican Hotel Association to deal with special issues which the association can take to the government.

Inflation and exchange rates presented some challenges for managers and their operations, especially regarding high import taxes and prices. While this is out of the control of individual Jamaican hotels, controlling inflation and stabilization of the devaluation of currency can relieve some pressure on hotels. Since hotels and tourism are major contributors to the GDP in the country, the government must try to create an optimal business environment. The government would greatly benefit by listening to the input of hotel general manager who not only seek to make a profit for the owners of their hotels but also create the best tourism experience in Jamaica.

Finally, shortage of materials was considered a major challenge. Adequate supplies are not available on the island, especially where food is concerned. The government could work with local suppliers, especially the farmers, to help ensure adequate supplies for hotels. This would help Jamaica reduce the need for imports and, thus, create a greater benefit to the country. Also the government could provide necessary aid to small entrepreneurs to help them produce some items locally so hotels would not need to import them.

Implications for future caribbean expatriate managers

Jayawardena and Haywood [12] noted that there is no formula for success in international hotel management. However, doing a quick analysis, understanding and accepting a country's attitude and aspirations, beliefs and behaviors, and the culture and customs of the host country may contribute to an expatriate hotel manager success.

The expatriate general managers agreed that, for international managers to be successful in Jamaica, they need to be flexible, open, and appreciate the culture of Jamaica. They also should be adaptable, patient, accepting of the culture, be firm, fair, have a good sense of humor, respect the people, and be non-authoritative. The opportunity to develop Jamaican workers, working with the warm and friendly people, making a difference in people's lives, enjoying the culture and climate, and helping to define and set hospitality standards were the factors found most favorable by expatriate general managers in Jamaica. Expatriates intending to be assigned in the Caribbean should consider adhering to some of these suggestions which may prove fruitful for a successful international assignment.

Limitations and future research

The present study has presented some salient information regarding expatriate management in hotels in a Caribbean context, beneficial to both expatriates and the destination itself. However, the study has its limitations. Since the study only examined expatriate general managers' perceptions of human resource factors and operational challenges, it did not seek to look at expatriate adjustment, satisfaction, and acculturation process. The study was exploratory and limited to nine managers in four-star and five-star properties. Therefore, future studies may want to consider additional hotels at all levels to determine if perceptions differed. The literature on expatriate management in the Caribbean and other developing countries is sparse which presented a challenge for study, since culture may impact specific finding regarding expatriate management.

This study was exploratory and qualitative in nature. Utilizing a quantitative study may yield results that provide for more generalization. In addition, further research could be conducted from the perspective of hotel employees and their attitudes toward expatriate management.

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