FACILITATING A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SELF-DIRECTION

Joseph D. Lema, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Hospitality Management
Drexel University
3001 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA
19104 USA

jdl42@drexel.edu

215-895-0955

FACILITATING A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SELF-DIRECTION

ABSTRACT

As rapid increases in technology continue to transform the tourism industry, a number of organizations have strategically implemented self-service processes to serve their customers and employees. This study focuses on the impact of self-directed learning within tourism organizations and to identify opportunities where self-directed learning may help to enhance service delivery with a bottom-up approach. With self-service technology providing new development opportunities and challenges throughout the tourism industry, an examination of the relationships that may exist will help to ensure that organizations within the tourism industry have the capacity to engage in self-directed activities on a front-line operational level. Furthermore, as technology influences the tourism industry, organizations are able to create new personalized and real-time marketing opportunities. This paper addresses implications for employees and customers within the tourism industry.

KEY WORDS: Self-direction, self-service technology, tourism development

INTRODUCTION

While the highly competitive tourism industry attempts to look for advantages in all segments of operations, minimal research has attempted to bridge constructs of self-directed learning readiness with selected variables from the tourism industry's largest and most significant resource -- its employees. As the world's largest employer with 231 million employees generating 10.4% of the world GDP, the tourism industry is rapidly expanding and forecasted to employ approximately 269.5 million people by the year 2015 (World Tourism &

Travel Council, 2006). The competitiveness of a tourism organization is the result of the skill level and adaptability of employees to initiate change in their jobs. With greater emphasis on productivity and accountability for individual performance, the responsibility for employees to rapidly adapt to change is moving from an organizational perspective to that of self-directedness. As many organizations in the tourism industry continue to consolidate, these organizations are experiencing mergers and acquisitions as rapidly as many individual employees change jobs and careers.

Coupled with increasing competition among tourism destinations, customers are demanding more sophisticated travel experiences in new and exciting areas. While considered a threat for some tourism destinations it is also a new opportunity for other tourism destinations to market themselves in unique and innovative ways. Technology, and particularly self-service technology, is an attractive strategy for tourism destinations to market their products and services that represent what their destination has to offer. More than simply the transmission of information to the customer, technology must actively engage customers, embrace a service orientation, and entertain. In addition, with self-service technology, facilitation must also include employee interaction and responsibility for success in creating a positive customer experience.

Developing a broader knowledge base of self-directed learning readiness with selected variables may not only benefit a people-based business that is highly concentrated in employing and serving people, but other researchers and practitioners can benefit from the unique social learning environment that the tourism industry has to offer. Specifically, this study intends to determine whether there is a significant relationship between self-directed learning readiness and personal characteristics (industry experience, education, age) of employees in the tourism industry. Self-service technology, for the purpose of this study, is defined in terms of technology

that enables customers and employees direct control over the time and pace of their activity.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Technology is continuing to change the environment of tourism including services, products, and customer experiences (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006). As technology in tourism organizations has provided much of the success over past challenges with self-service strategies, human capital investment is required to match personal characteristics necessary to maximize the full potential of self-service benefits. From the implementation of automated bank teller machines in 1969, self-service gas stations, on-line banking, airline and hotel self-check-in, self-service food and beverage venues, entertainment ticket kiosks, self-service employee health and benefit enrollment, and self-directed succession planning, employees and customers of today are becoming more rapidly exposed to and demanding of self-service technologies (Erdly & Chatterjee, 2003). The explosion of on-line learning in education and business is another example and result of the rapid increases in technology. An article in The Economist reported, "Self-service is now doing for the service sector what mass production once did for manufacturing, automating processes and significantly reducing costs" (You're Hired, 2004, p. 21).

Although the capacity of self-service strategies is limited by the competency of the user, self-directed learning is at the center of the self-service concept. The rapid development of self-service technology is significantly influencing tourism organizations by providing new opportunities and challenges for customers and employees. A recent Time magazine article reported the popularity of self-service with "U.S. customers spending $128 billion at self-service

kiosks last year, an 80 percent jump from the year before, and by 2007 it could hit $1.3 trillion"
(Kiviat, 2004, p. 101). To maximize learning capacity, self-directed learning readiness is a
required strategy to consider with the self-service concept.

Self-service allows users greater control over their experience, just as self-directed
learning emphasizes the learner's personal control over his or her own learning experience
(Long, 2000). Experience has played a significant role in the process of self-directed learning,
adult learning, and adult education (Merriam & Brockett, 1997). Knowles (1973) values the
experiences that adults bring to the learning environment as a rich learning resource that can
significantly contribute to learning processes. Adults, Knowles argues, can bring valuable
experiences that carry immediate unique skills to the learning process.

These unique skills and experiences may have been acquired throughout their lifetime,
and when the learner is able to recognize familiar connections to previous experiences, learning
can be greatly accelerated, carrying great potential to expand the learner's base of knowledge.
Experience, Lindeman (1961) similarly explains, should be the highest priority and value in adult
education. Lindeman was not an advocate for classifications of knowledge that would allow for
specializations in small concentrated areas that neglect other areas of life; rather, he focused on
learning and connecting meaning to categories of life experiences. One important assumption
stressed in Lindeman's philosophy of adult education is that education is life and learning that
can be applied to immediate, day-to-day experience is the greatest quality of education. In
addition, as adults progress through life, they gather a wealth of experience that may add value to
learning when meaning is connected to the experience through personal evaluation.

Not all experiences may be equally educative; however, Dewey (1938) explains, some experiences are miseducative and can inhibit future growth. While Dewey did not equate experience with education, he did regard education coming through experience. The quality of the experience, according to Dewey, is important for the learner in regards to agreeableness or disagreeableness and influence on further experiences. Dewey describes continuity and interaction as inseparable unifying aspects of experience in multiple dimensions (lateral and longitudinal). The interplay between continuity and interaction form what Dewey refers to as a situation. The interpretation of an experience is determined by the past experience and the objective or situation of the present. All experiences, claims Dewey, are stored from an individual's past, carried forward, and have an influence on all future experiences. Dewey's rigorous commitment to understand the nature of experience and practical value of experience has significantly contributed to individual growth, learning strategies, and educational theories.

Age, Long (1991) argues, is a characteristic of adult learning and, although it may be regarded as situational, it is one of the guiding principles used to distinguish adult education from other forms of education and pre-adult schooling. Distinguishing adult learning from pre-adult learning, Long discusses, is one of the predominant practices in adult education. As adults mature, Knowles (1984) argues, they become increasingly self-directed. Knowles' (1975) andragogical framework outlines five assumptions of a mature adult as having an independent self-concept, accumulation of life experiences, a need for learning related to changing social roles, a need for immediate application of knowledge that is problem centered, and internal motivations for learning. Based on principles of adult learning theories, as people mature and often become more introspective, it may appear that their ability to be self-directed would increase, but, upon further investigation, the results may be inconclusive.

Similarly, as Mezirow (1985) explains, a prerequisite for autonomy in self-directed learning is self-knowledge. Furthermore, Mezirow claims that understanding reasons for an individual's wants, interests, and needs happens through critical reflection of historical, biographical, and cultural events. Maturity, Mezirow argues, is central to the process of critical reflection just as critical reflection is to self-knowledge. Mezirow extends the notion of critical thinking to self-reflective learning. Developing a clearer understanding, according to Mezirow, involves identifying dysfunction in one's life by understanding psychological assumptions of dependency acquired from experiences earlier in life. Brookfield (1987) similarity links critical reflection to critical thinking involving an ability to question existing behaviors, ideas, and information. Brookfield identifies four components to critical thinking as the ability to identify and challenge existing assumptions, recognition of the context of thoughts and actions, considering alternatives, and developing a reflective skepticism of existing behaviors.

In the tourism industry, as self-service strategies dominate changes taking place within technological processes, support for formal, informal, and incidental learning will be necessary on an individual level and collectively throughout organizations. Continuous learning as part of an everyday process that encompasses broader aspects of employee development requires greater understanding of related variables that will lead to further development. The shift from learning as a classroom activity to more fluid methods of learning may facilitate employees to take greater personal responsibility and control for their own learning and acquiring knowledge in a learning organization (Buyens, Wouters, & Dewettinck, 2003). Effective employees who thrive in rapidly changing environments and high levels of competition will lead to satisfied customers (Iverson, 2001).

Learning on an organizational level depends on the learning capabilities of the employees to acquire and disseminate new knowledge in certain and uncertain operating conditions. Furthermore, employees in learning organizations require problem solving capabilities that lead to development in their capacity for future continuous learning (Senge, 1990). In highly competitive environments induced with an explosion of knowledge and technology, such as the tourism industry, adaptation to change is at the center of organizational learning capabilities (Buyens et al., 2003). With technology fueling the growth in the demand for continuous learning processes, human resource development professionals must refocus the traditional roles of trainers who simply provide specific training activities to becoming facilitators of change. Training activities, Buyens et al. argue, remains a part of human resource development but is not necessarily the main product. Creating a work environment that is favorable for learning with unique personal development opportunities is the focus of an effective human resource development strategy. Participation in learning activities provides learners the opportunity to actively shape the learning environment that fits closely to their job responsibilities. Integrating training directly with work activities, Buyens et al. suggests that more fluid levels of continuous learning may be achieved with real life challenges centered on the job. Fostering learning on the job is one of the most stimulating work environments for employees and creates an important condition for creating an effective learning atmosphere.

METHODOLOGY

A facilitator administered the survey to 216 employees who volunteered for the study and were employed in the tourism industry. Completion time of the survey was 30 minutes. Participants were granted privacy in a secluded room while completing the survey to ensure accurate and honest responses to survey questions. Participants were presented with an informed

consent form before they participated in the study that clearly stated the voluntary nature of participation, ability to withdraw from the survey at any time, and confidentiality of the participants' identities. The convenience sample size of 216 employees was adequate for the three predictors in the stepwise multiple linear regression model and consisted of a balanced representation of industry experience, education, and age.

A survey integrating the Oddi Continuing Learning Inventory (OCLI), and descriptive questions was presented to the participants as a five-page instrument consisting of 49 questions. The OCLI instrument was administered to assess employees' levels of self-directed learning readiness. The relationships among OCLI scores and personal characteristics (industry experience, education, age) were examined. Respondents circled an answer from a seven point Likert scale ranging from one, *strongly agree,* to seven, *strongly disagree,* to best describe their behavior. The survey was scored by the researcher of this study according to the guidelines provided by the author, Oddi, to obtain an overall OCLI measurement. The total self-directed learning readiness score from the survey was used in the statistical procedures as recommended in the literature (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Oddi, 1984).

Developed as a doctoral dissertation by Oddi (1984), the OCLI instrument was administered to assess employees' levels of self-directed learning readiness. Personal characteristics (industry experience, education, age), and OCLI scores were examined. Data were coded as follows: (a) education--coded by highest attainment level of *high school, associate's degree, still at university (undergraduate), bachelor's degree, still at university (graduate), master's degree and higher.* The OCLI survey is one of the most widely reliable and validated instruments used for the measurement of readiness for self-directed learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). The OCLI survey consists of 24 items measuring the level of self-directed

learning readiness of adults. With a reported Cronbach's alpha of .88 and retest reliability of r =.89, the OCLI is an adequately reliable instrument for this study (Oddi, 1984).

By examining the relationship of the survey constructs to behavioral characteristics that indicate self-directed learning readiness, validation of the OCLI instrument was conducted (Oddi, Ellis, & Altman-Roberson, 1990). Three theories were developed to describe the affective, motivational, and cognitive attributes of the self-directed learner. The proactive drive versus reactive drive, commitment to learning versus apathy to learning, and cognitive openness versus defensiveness were reported by Oddi et al. (1990) to be the three constructs that emerged. Factor analysis reported by Oddi (1984) indicated that OCLI items contained self-confidence, autonomous learning, and learning with the participation of others. When items were loaded on a general factor analysis, reading avidity and self-regulation emerged as subsidiary factors. No factor was related to the cognitive openness in the analysis since scores failed to correlate with the adult intelligence factor. When scores failed to correlate with adult intelligence, discriminate validity was provided. The two other dimensions that Oddi describes as reading avidity and ability to be self-regulating positively correlated with self-confidence, participation, and endurance. These results indicate that the total OCLI score can be used to provide a reliable and valid measure for the construct of self-directed learning readiness.

FINDINGS

Due to missing responses on the OCLI scale, four participants were eliminated from the study with 212 participants providing an adequate sample size for the number of predictors used in the stepwise multiple linear regression model. Descriptive data for the total sample include gender, age, ethnicity, education, position, and tourism related industry experience. The sample

contained 52% females ($n = 111$) and 48% males ($n = 101$). The average age of the participants was 34 years, with employees ranging from 21 to 63 years of age. Ethnicity was divided with 14% African American ($n = 30$), 2% American Indian ($n = 5$), 17% Asian ($n = 35$), 45% Caucasian ($n = 96$), 13% Hispanic ($n = 27$), and 9% Pacific Islander ($n = 19$). Level of education represented 35% with a high school diploma ($n = 76$), 12% with an associate's degree ($n = 25$), 24% enrolled in undergraduate education ($n = 50$), 19% with a completed bachelor's degree ($n = 41$), 3% enrolled in graduate education ($n = 6$), and 7% with a completed master's degree or higher ($n = 14$). In addition, the sample consisted of 34% working as supervisors ($n = 71$), while the majority, 66%, were nonsupervisors ($n = 141$). Industry experience for employees who participated in the study ranged from less than a year to 33 years, with an average number of 8 years of tourism related work experience.

The final stepwise multiple linear regression model consisted of one predictor variable, education, while industry experience and age were excluded. Data inspection did not locate any outliers, therefore, no cases were deleted from the analysis. Evaluations of linearity, Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests of normality, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity showed that the assumptions were met within the range of tolerance. One of the three variables, education, entered into the overall model, $R^2 = .81$, R^2adj $= .81$, $F(1, 210) = 197.52$, $p = .001$. The final stepwise multiple linear regression model accounted for 81.1% of the variance in OCLI scores.

The stepwise multiple linear regression model reported that education had a statistically significant relationship (.05 level of significance) to the self-directed learning readiness of employees in the tourism industry. The strength of the correlation between education and self-directed learning readiness ($r = .696$) indicated that the higher the level of education attained, the higher self-directed learning readiness scores.

CONCLUSION

This research examined whether significant relationships exist among selected personal variables related to the self-directed learning readiness of employees in the tourism industry. Based on the results of these findings, strategies may be focused to align learning initiatives to maximize performance expectations. Specifically, by understanding the strength that education, for example, has on the self-directed learning readiness of employees, strategies can help to align effective processes that embrace self-directed learning and support areas that threaten or inhibit self-directed learning.

With greater emphasis on productivity and accountability for individual performance, organizations in the tourism industry are required to maximize the talents of all employees through continuous change and learning opportunities. With the rapid development of technology, specifically self-service technology, new opportunities and challenges for tourism organizations are being created. Since the competitiveness of tourism organizations is the result of the skill level and ability of employees to rapidly adapt to change, responsibility for performance is increasingly shifting towards self-directedness. Senge (1990) similarly argues that the challenge of an organization is to effectively engage employees with continuous and personal learning.

As self-service technologies are leading change initiatives in the tourism industry, continuous learning activities that build critical thinking skills will be necessary for tourism organizations to competitively operate in this uncertain and rapidly developing environment. Furthermore, as technology continues to fuel the growth of information, employees are being challenged to continuously interpret and apply new information that is relevant to their unique situations. Self-service technology is reported to be at the beginning of the adoption curve and,

within the near future, is expected to expand in growth from $128 billion to over $41.3 trillion (Frary, 2005). The impact for employees and customers is expected to be enormous. In view of this staggering opportunity for growth, learning initiatives will need close examination to ensure that employees' skill levels can optimize the organization's technological capabilities.

From a customer perspective, opportunities exist to market tourism destinations on a personal level through technology. With the rapid implementation of self-service kiosks for example, marketing opportunities exist to communicate unique promotions based on user's preferences. While technology has gone beyond simply the transmission of communicating information, an exciting and entertaining aspect may be implemented to engage customers in the service experience, along with facilitation from all employees. As digital technology enables real-time programming and increased mobility, self-service technology will continue to create new marketing opportunities and unique service delivery options for tourism organizations and destinations.

REFERENCES

Brockett, R. G., & Hiemstra, R. (1991). *Self-direction in adult learning: Perspectives on theory, research, and practice.* New York: Routledge. Brookfield, S. D. (1987). *Developing critical thinkers.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Brookfield, S. D. (1987). *Developing critical thinkers.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Buyens, D., Wouters, K., & Dewettinck, K. (2003). Future challenges for human resource development in European learning-oriented organizations. *Journal of European Industrial Training, 25*, 442-453. Retrieved July 22, 2007, from http://www.vlerick. be/research/workingpapers/wp2003.htm

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education.* New York: The Macmillan Company.

Erdly, M., & Chatterjee, A. (2003, October). The case for self-service hospitality. *Hospitality Upgrade.* Retrieved July 6, 2007, from http://www.hotelonline.com/News/ PR2003_4th/Oct03_SelfServiceTech.html

Frary, M. (2005). Self-service: Future or fad? *Amadeus Global Travel Distribution.* Retrieved March 20, 2008, from http://www.amadeus.com

Goeldner, C. R., & Ritchie, J. R. (2006). *Tourism: Principles, practices, philosophies (10th ed).* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Iverson, K. M. (2001). *Managing human resources in the hospitality industry: An experiential approach.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Kiviat, B. (2004, September). May you help you? *Time, 164*(10), 101-102. Retrieved July 13, 2007, from EBSCO Host database.

Knowles, M. S. (1973). T*he adult learner: A neglected species*. Houston, TX: Gulf Publishing

     Company.

Knowles, M. S. (1975). *Self-directed learning*. New York: Association Press

Knowles, M. S. (1984). *The adult learner: A neglected species (3rd ed.).* Houston, TX: Gulf

     Publishing Company.

Lindeman, E. (1961). *The meaning of adult education.* Norman, OK: Oklahoma Research Center

     for Continuing Professional and Higher Education.

Long, H. B. (Ed.). (1991). *Self-directed learning: Consensus and Conflict.*Norman, OK:

     Oklahoma Research Center for Continuing Professional and Higher Education,

     University of Oklahoma.

Long, H. B. (2000). The elusive concept of self-directed learning. *Self-Directed Learning and*

     the Information Age. Retrieved July 13, 2007, from EBSCO Host database.

Merriam, S. B., & Brockett, R. G. (1997). *The profession and practice of adult education*: *An*

     introduction. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J. (1985). A critical theory of self-directed learning. *Self-Directed Learning: From*

     Theory to Practice (Report No. 25). San Francisco: New Directions for Continuing

     Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ313257).

Oddi, L. F. (1984). Development of an instrument to measure self-directed learning (Doctoral

     dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1984). *Dissertation Abstracts International, 46*,

     01.

Oddi, L. F., Ellis, A. J., & Altman-Roberson, J. E. (1990). Construct validation of the ODDI

     continuing learning inventory. *Adult Education Quarterly, 40*, 139-145.

Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline*. New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing Group.

World Travel & Tourism Council. (2006). *WTTC research*. Retrieved July 2, 2007, from

https://www.wttc.org/eng/ About_WTTC/index.php

You're Hired. (2004). *The Economist*, *372*, 8393, 21-23. Retrieved July 9, 2007, from EBSCO

Host database.