

EFFECTIVENESS OF OPERATIONAL MANUALS ON EDUCATION FOR YOUNG WORKERS IN JAPANESE-STYLE HOTELS

Nobukawa K*

Faculty of Global Culture and Communication, Aichi Shukutoku University, Japan

Abstract: Japanese-style hotels (ryokans) play an important role in the tourism sector in Japan. Among overseas people planning to visit Japan, 73% wanted to stay in a ryokan before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, ryokans do not have well-organized training programs for young workers to satisfy the diverse needs of guests. This study examined the educational effectiveness of operational manuals for development of hospitality to satisfy these needs. Questionnaire and interview surveys were conducted at ryokans to examine the educational effectiveness of the manuals, using Kolb's experiential learning model. The questionnaire items were related to the educational effects of the manuals. The target area was a regional city in Ishikawa Prefecture, where the Shinkansen bullet train opened in 2015. An analysis of the survey data on young employee development and the potential value of work manuals for ryokans led to two conclusions. First, partial manuals including an appropriate amount of explicit knowledge were effective in supporting two steps in Kolb's theory: reflective observation and abstract conceptualization. Second, four elements of updating of manuals: customer needs, opinions of person in charge, opinions of outsiders and regular updates, influenced a presentation of an appropriate quality of explicit knowledge, which can promote abstract conceptualization and support acquisition of tacit knowledge. The study showed the usefulness of utilizing partial manuals in the early stages of training of employees in ryokans. This implies that the representation of explicit knowledge enhances the effectiveness of training. In particular, the partial manuals can facilitate two steps in Kolb's theory (reflective observation and abstract conceptualization) in the ryokan industry.

Keywords: Japanese-style hotels (ryokans), young workers, experiential learning theory, operational manuals, explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge

Introduction

The Japanese government has been working to develop the tourism industry by launching inbound promotion initiatives since the 2000s. In 2016, there were 24.04 million overseas tourists to Japan, and the goal is 60 million by 2030. Among overseas tourists, 73% prefer to stay at Japanese-traditional style hotels (ryokans), instead of regular hotels. These tourists also want to eat Japanese food, bathe in onsens (hot springs), and see nature, historic sites and historical architecture, as parts of their experience in Japan. Japanese tourists also want to enjoy hot springs, food and nature. These are all experiences offered at ryokans, which indicates the major need for these ryokans.

In 2017, there were 55,567 ryokans in Japan, and 276 ryokans have been registered as tangible cultural properties designated by the Japanese government. Some ryokans were built many years ago and are

*Corresponding Author's Email: keiko15@asu.aasa.ac.jp



historical, and these are tourism resources for experiencing tradition and culture. However, 90% of ryokans are small to medium-sized and their employees are still trained in the traditional apprentice system. Furthermore, introducing new education and training systems are difficult since due to less financial capacity and staffing shortage. For example, they do not have an employee training system similar to that of large hotels. To accommodate many diverse tourists, including overseas tourists, it is important to establish an effective system for training younger employees in ryokans. This is particularly true since the COVID-19 pandemic had severe negative effects on many industries, including travel and hotel businesses, and systematic training systems are needed for recovery of tourism, including at ryokans.

Many studies related to the hotel industry have reported that the human resource management (HRM) has an impact on retention and productivity. Factors for prevention of turnover and improvement of productivity that have been examined in the literature are represented in Figure 1.

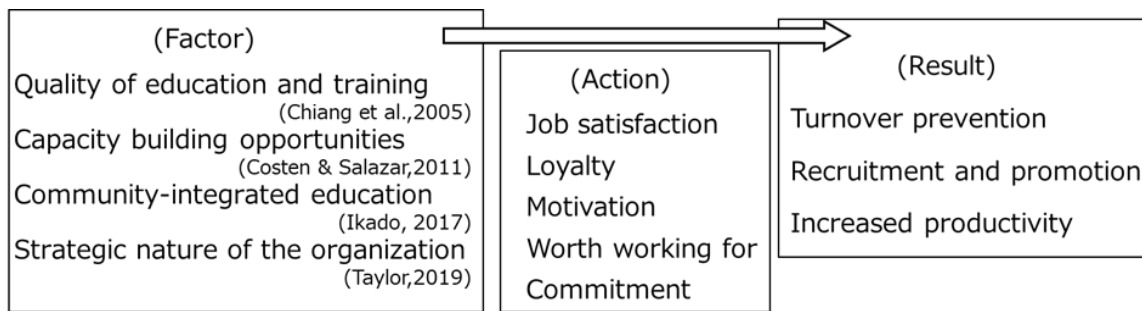


Figure 1: Factors for prevention of turnover and improvement of productivity in the hotel business.

Chiang et al. (2005) focused on the quality of education and training in hotels and found in a quantitative study that satisfaction with training quality affected job satisfaction and increased employee retention in the organization. Costen and Salazar (2011) reported that employees of hotels who received development opportunities were more likely to be satisfied with their jobs, to be more loyal, and to stay with the company. These results suggest the importance of continuing to invest in employee education and training opportunities, even as an organization moves into financially difficult times.

Ikado (2017) conducted an interview survey in a hot spring village in Gunma Prefecture on business success and training of young employees at ryokans. This study indicated that community-wide support ("one mountain, one family") for development of young employees was effective for enhancing a sense of solidarity, maintaining work motivation, and preventing job turnover. Taylor (2019) focused on the strategic nature of HRM in Japanese basic hotels, and noted the importance of sharing the direction of development, improving the working environment, and implementing training measures in tandem. Strategic development was found to enable efficient provision of high-quality services, even with a small number of employees. Thus, there is a trend in previous studies to review hotel personnel development as a management measure that prevents turnover and promotes retention.

Studies of employee development in other industries have found that the acquisition of skills and improvement of the abilities of individuals are important for corporate and industrial growth (Swanson 1995; Nakahara 2014). Therefore, the direct effects of education and training on individual skill acquisition and improved capability are important for development of a company's business.

With this background, the purpose of this study is to explore the essential elements of effective training methods for young employees in ryokans, with a focus on ability growth. In particular, this study

focuses on development of young employees in the early stages of training, and investigates learning of explicit knowledge from survey data related to operation manuals, using an analysis based on the experiential learning theory proposed by Kolb (2015). Although many studies for worker education in hotels using the Kolb's theory were reported (e.g., Solnet, 2009), no study for improvement of worker education in ryokans (Japanese style hotel), according to literature survey by author. As explained in following section "Method", the number of response for questionnaire survey was not sufficient for the quantitative analysis, obtained results in this study were dealt as qualitative data.

Methods

The survey targeted ryokans in Ishikawa prefecture of Japan, where the Hokuriku Shinkansen bullet train opened in 2015. In Ishikawa prefecture, the rapid increase in overseas and domestic tourists and their diverse needs were seen to present a challenge for employee development. The purpose of the survey was to determine the current status of HRM for young employees in ryokans and to analyze trends in training. A questionnaire survey of 59 ryokans registered in Ishikawa prefecture (total number of ryokans was 230) by the Japanese government was conducted by mail from November to December 2019, and 22 responses (37% of response rate) were received. Since the sample size and the response number were insufficient for quantitative analysis, the survey results are discussed as qualitative trends.

As shown in Figure 2, ryokans are predominantly small and medium-sized. However, to identify common issues among ryokans, the data were evaluated without classifying the ryokans based on the number of employees. We also confirmed the relationship between business performance and training measures as an indicator of the smoothness of employee development (Figure 3). Each ryokan chose one response from five levels for the performance questionnaire based on present condition including not only numerical data such as the profit but also non-numerical information. The survey showed that the average number of young employees (age range: 18-24, defined by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare) was 8.5. Figure 4 indicates that managers in most of ryokans recognize the problems for training young employees. After the questionnaire survey, interviews with management-level respondents at two ryokans were conducted in January 2020.

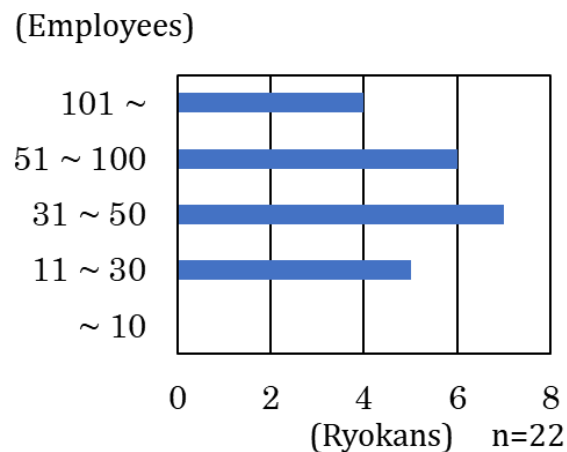


Figure 2: Categories of ryokans with different numbers of employees.

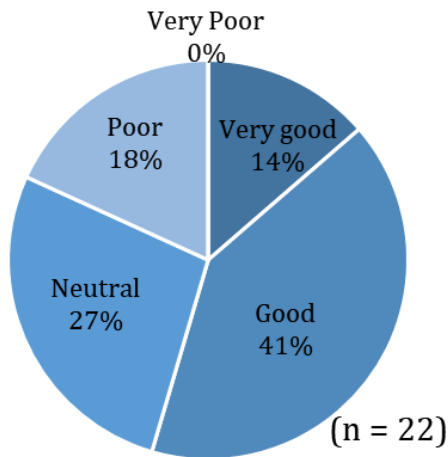


Figure 3: Distribution of performance in ryokans.

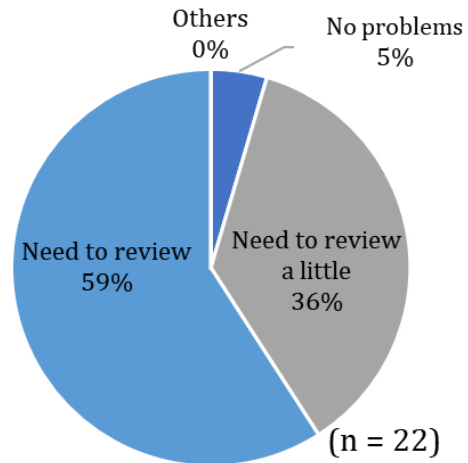


Figure 4: Perspective of managers in ryokans on education for young employees.

The survey data were analyzed using the framework of Kolb's experiential learning theory (Kolb 2015). The basis of this theory is that a simple experience alone does not lead to improvement in ability. However, improvement is achieved through introspection of the experience. The theory uses a four-step process of concrete experience, reflection on the experience through reflective observation, generalization and schema development through abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation to apply the generalization and schema. This theory also provides a model that simplifies the process of learning from experience into a circular theory that can be used in practice. Therefore, the theory enables analysis of the structure of competence growth with clarification of the process of learning from work experience.

Results and Discussion

The survey results are discussed in three parts with respect to the operational manuals used in the early stages of training. Generally, these manuals clearly state skills and knowledge. Using Kolb's theory, two steps in experiential learning (reflective observation and abstract conceptualization) were first examined with respect to the manuals. In contrast to the other two steps (concrete experience and active experimentation), these steps take place in the individual's domain, away from the field, and are difficult to support with external training.

Manuals and reflective observation

The results of the survey for operations manuals are shown in Figure 5. Of the ryokans that responded to the survey, 55% had introduced customer service manuals, 4% had partial manuals, and 9% had manuals for all operations. In total, 68% of ryokans had some kinds of manuals. Furthermore, among the 55% ryokans that had introduced customer service manuals, 67% indicated that the manuals were effective for training of workers. The single ryokan with partial manuals also regarded the manuals to be effective for training. However, the effects of training could not be confirmed due to the insufficient number of responses from ryokans that had introduced manuals for all operations.

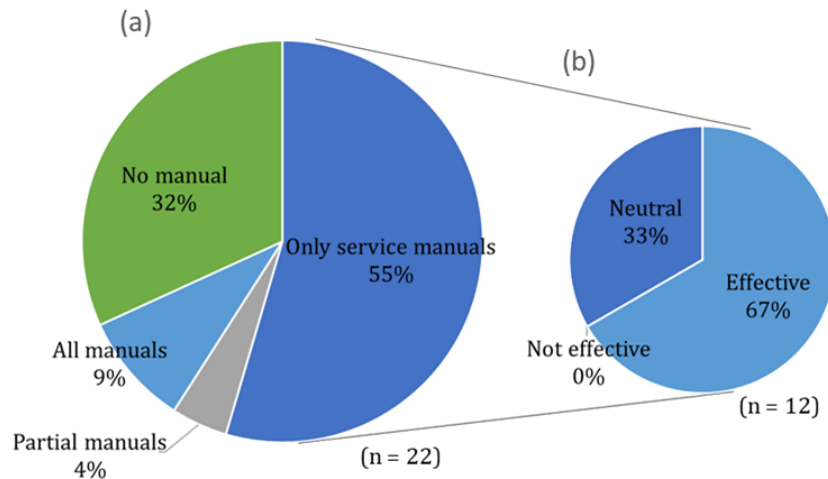


Figure 5: (a) Adoption of manuals at ryokans. (b) Effectiveness of service manuals for education of young employees.

These results suggest that partial manuals, such as customer service manuals, are more useful than manuals for all tasks in training for young workers. Manuals present “explicit knowledge” as tools that can be used repeatedly, and provide young people working at a job for the first time with clear business knowledge. In looking back on work they have experienced (that is, reflective observations), the manuals serve as a guide and facilitate the process of reflection. It is also of note that partial manuals may be more effective. For newcomers such as young workers, the partial manuals provide a moderate amount of information, which makes it easier to find the main points of their experience. Furthermore, the limited information may encourage them to find meaning in their experience. This suggests that manuals with an appropriate amount of information can have a nurturing effect.

Manuals and abstract conceptualization

The relationship between manuals and abstract conceptualization is discussed in this section. The relationship of business performance at ryokans with and without customer service manuals is shown in Figure 6. For ryokans that had introduced service manuals, 67% reported that business performance was good, whereas only 29% of ryokans without manuals reported similarly good performance. Thus, there was a positive relationship of good business performance with the introduction of customer service manuals. A survey by the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) also found that companies with high labor productivity used partial manuals for customer service and other aspects of their operations. The results of the current study are consistent with these findings.

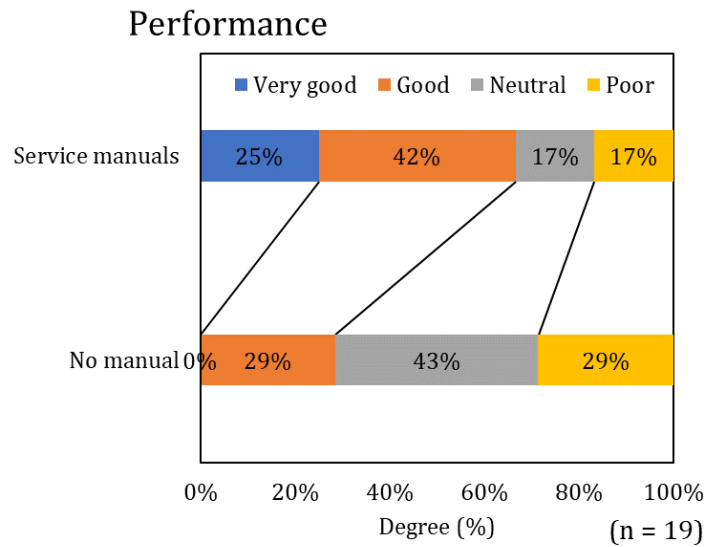


Figure 6: Relationship of introduction of customer service manuals with business performance.

The survey suggested that manuals for all operations restrict actions, whereas partial manuals present a moderate range of explicit knowledge and provide loose guidelines for abstract conceptualization or digesting actions into a schema. Thus, partial manuals have positive effects on education for workers. Normally, manuals are tools aimed at standardization. However, partial manuals that do not prescribe the entire operation may provide opportunities for flexible and free thinking, such as that needed for hospitality. This is necessary for high value-added services that increase productivity and for improvement of each worker’s own behavior. This effect of training may be reflected in the business performance.

Effects of updating the manuals

The results of interviews for two ryokans that had implemented customer service manuals are discussed in this section, with regard to the operation of the manuals. Both ryokans responded that manuals had been effective in fostering growth of their staff. However, there was a difference in business performance: Ryokan A had “very good” business performance, while Ryokan B indicated “neutral” performance. Although both ryokans were updating their manuals, there were some differences in the update approaches. As shown in Table 1, four elements of manual updating were extracted from the interview data to differentiate between the two ryokans.

1. The content should be tailored to customer needs.
2. It should reflect the opinions of person in charge of the field.
3. It should incorporate objective and new opinions of outsiders.
4. Frequency of updates.

Table 1: Elements for updating manuals.

	Customer needs	Opinion of person in charge	Opinion of outsiders	Update frequency
Ryokan A	Consider	Consider	Accept	Regular
Ryokan B	Consider	Consider	No	Irregular

Business performance: Ryokan A: very good, Ryokan B: neutral

Ryokan A was regularly updating the manuals based on customer needs, views of person in charge, and outsider opinions. In contrast, Ryokan B had no outsider opinion and updates were irregular. This suggests a difference in the quality of explicit knowledge presented in the manuals at the two ryokans. Manuals that were regularly improved based on issues such as customer needs were optimized in terms of explicit knowledge. This improvement in explicit knowledge facilitates reflective observation and abstract conceptualization, and experiential learning is cycled. The cycle of experiential learning is likely to improve the competence of young people and help them acquire the hospitality skills necessary for ryokans. Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995) explain that organizational knowledge is improved through internal brainstorming and feedback from outsiders, and that the interaction of explicit and tacit knowledge advances organizational knowledge creation. Thus, improvement of explicit knowledge through updating of manuals develops hospitality skills for high value-added services, and this was reflected in the better business performance of Ryokan A.

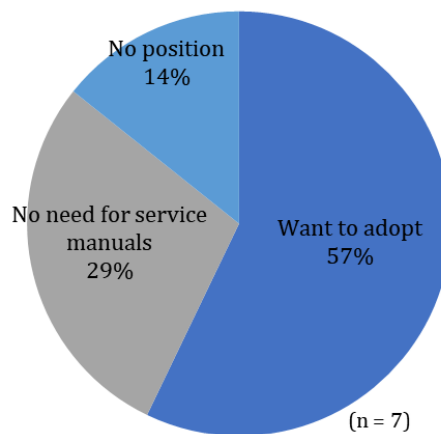


Figure 7: Attitudes of ryokans that had not introduced service manuals.

Data showing the views of ryokans that had no service manuals are shown in Figure 7. Among these ryokans, 57% wanted to adopt the manuals, but 29% considered that service manuals were unnecessary and 14% had not considered such manuals. Among the ryokans with negative views of the manuals, there was a scattering of respondents who said that they did not intend to introduce manuals because hospitality cannot be learned from manuals. This reflects the idea that hospitality and other tacit knowledge is an inherent trait, as many Japanese people consider. However, the survey data suggest that manuals including explicit knowledge can be effective in growth of hospitality to satisfy diverse needs. This indicates the need for a change in attitudes toward human resource management.

Conclusion

This study examined the educational effectiveness of operational manuals for development of hospitality skills in young employees in Japanese-style hotels (ryokans) in Ishikawa Prefecture, Japan.

Questionnaire and interview surveys at ryokans were conducted and educational effectiveness was examined using Kolb's experiential learning model.

Based on the analysis of survey data on young employee development and the potential of work manuals for ryokans, the following two conclusions were obtained. First, partial manuals including an appropriate amount of explicit knowledge were effective in supporting two steps in Kolb's theory: reflective observation and abstract conceptualization. Second, updating manuals based on four elements of customer needs, opinions of person in charge, opinions of outsiders and regular updates permits presentation of an appropriate quality of explicit knowledge, which can promote abstract conceptualization and support acquisition of tacit knowledge.

The study showed the usefulness of utilizing partial manuals in the early stages of training of employees in ryokans. This implies that the representation of explicit knowledge enhances the effectiveness of training. In particular, the partial manuals can facilitate two steps in Kolb's theory (reflective observation and abstract conceptualization) in the ryokan industry.

The results of this study will help to identify solutions to the important issue of establishing effective training methods for young employees, and will contribute to the promotion of the tourism industry through the realization of high value-added services. Due to the small sample size, a further survey of more ryokans should be carried out to verify the results of this study.

Declaration of Interest Statement

The author declares that they have no conflict of interests.

References

Chiang, C. F., Back, K. J., & Canter, D. D. (2005). The Impact of Employee Training on Job Satisfaction and Intention to Stay in the Hotel Industry. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, 4(2), 99–118.

Costen, W. M., & Salazar, J. (2011). The Impact of Training and Development on Employee Job Satisfaction, Loyalty, and Intent to Stay in the Lodging Industry. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, 10(3), 273-284.

DBJ/JTBF (Development Bank of Japan and Japan Travel Bureau Foundation). (2016). DBJ/JTBF: Survey on Tourist Travel to Japan from Asia, Europe, America and Australia 2016, Retrieved from https://www.dbj.jp/upload/investigate/docs/book1610_01.pdf (accessed on July 15, 2022). (in Japanese).

Ikado, T. (2017). The Current Status and Challenges of the Ryokan Industry: A Study on Business Succession. *Studies of Regional policy*, 20(2), 61-80. (in Japanese)

JTB Tourism Research & Consulting Co. (2017). Survey on Food and Travel, Retrieved from https://www.jtbcorp.jp/scripts_hd/image_view.asp?menu=news&id=00001&news_no=2456 (accessed on July 15, 2022). (in Japanese).

Kolb, D. A. (2015). *Experiential learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development (2nd ed.)*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), Small and Medium Enterprise Agency. (2008). *White Paper on Small and Medium Enterprises 2008*. Tokyo, Japan: Gyosei. (in Japanese)

- Nakahara, J. (2014). Study for “Learning on Workspace”. *Organizational Science*, 48(2), 28-37. (in Japanese)
- Nonaka, I., & Takeuchi, H. (1995). *The Knowledge Creating Company: How Japanese Companies Create the Dynamics of Innovation*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Solnet, D., Kralj, A., Kay, C., & DeVeau, L. (2009). A Lodging Internship Competency Model: Enhancing Educational Outcomes Through Work Integrated Learning. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, 21(4), 16-24.
- Swanson, R. A. (1995). Human Resource Development: Performance is the Key. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 6(2), 207-213.
- Taylor, M. (2019). Human Resource Development as a Growth Strategy in the Lodging Industry: Current Situation and Issues in the Hotel Industry. *The Japan Institute of Labour*, 61(7), 47-59. (in Japanese)