

# Multi Skilling: Empowering Employees or a Challenge for Them? Case Study Approach

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## Abstract

### Purpose:

Fundamentally addresses the reasons for introducing multi skilling within the organization across all major operational departments in a resort.

### Design/ Methodology/ Approach:

A case study methodology has been utilized to highlight the various benefits that an organization, in this case a resort has received by implementing multiskilling practices. It also examines the various challenges faced in adopting multi skilling and how an organization has overcome these challenges faced during the implementation of multi skilling and introducing it across the organization.

### Practical Implications:

Resorts often face the challenge of having skilled employees throughout the year; implementing multi skilling overcomes this challenge by helping the resorts resolve the issue with labour flexibility. Multi skilling has helped employees to look at growing within the organization across various verticals in an operational department or to grow across departments. It also has helped in bringing about a positive employee relation within the organization.

**Keywords:** Multiskilling, Major Operational Departments, Labour Flexibility, Positive Employee Relations

## Introduction

Multiskilling means to skill people in different skilled requisite areas, here the employees were trained in basic tasks of the operational departments.

This study was concentrated on two resorts, Queen's Garden Resort, Ooty and the Mountain View, Conoor. An independent researcher Mr. Swaminathan head of M/s

Corporate Solutions was called in by the Regional Human Resources Manager Mr. Marimuthu for both the resorts as both the resorts were having unique problems with respect to manpower issues. Mr Swaminathan, focused on both the resorts and then came with the suggestion of multiskilling the employees to handle the issues. He listed down the practices that need to be followed to make sure that the problems are sorted once multiskilling is implemented.

## Literature Review

As per the previous researches conducted on multiskilling, it has been described multiskilling as the acquisition of skills, knowledge, competency and experiences, which develops and enables the individual to perform tasks outside the immediate job requirements Davis (2004). Researchers have found that multiskilling provides the organization with a flexible and adaptable employee, and creates a pool of human resources. Multiskilling also has been recognized as an important tool to cope with environmental changes, economic success, improved productivity and profit margins, and lower levels of turnover (Marchante, Ortega, & Pagan 2006).

One of the major advantages of multiskilling has been found to be Labour flexibility, it (via multiskilling) in all aspects of employment relationship has provided organizations with the capability to match the supply and demand for labour more closely and thus achieve more efficiency in the management of labour (Kelliher & Riley 2002). Flexible work arrangements can thus, be achieved by allowing the employment of workers under variable conditions, for different purposes and periods, and with

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quite disparate expectations (Nankervis, Compton, & Baird 2008).

Another advantage of multiskilling are related to job enlargement (wider range of job tasks), rotation and enrichment (more complexity of tasks) (Campling, Poole, Wiesner, & Schermerhorn 2006). Horizontal job enlargement adds more challenges or new responsibilities to an individual's current job from simple tasks (De Cieri, Kramar, Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright 2008). The individual can also be horizontally rotated from one functional area or department to another over the course of time for the development of job experiences. Such rotation is a way to develop an individual's skills to close skills gap for a job that remains vacant or is a mismatch for existing skills (De Cieri, et al. 2008).

## Methodology

Multiskilling means to skill people in different skilled requisite areas, here the employees were trained in basic tasks of the operational departments. As both the Resorts Queen's Garden Resort, Ooty and the Mountain View, Conoor were having unique Human Resources issues hence a case study methodology was utilized to understand the challenges of these resorts.

Resort 1: Queen's Garden Resort, Ooty: This resort was started almost 21 years ago. Almost 30% of the employees have been working for the past 20 years, the challenge the organization faces with these employees were that they were feeling bored due to the monotonous jobs that they were performing, and over a period of time they were feeling stagnated in the organization. But these set of employees were satisfied with the organization.

The second group of employees that the study focused were the people who had been in the organization for more than 2 years. Since this group had got trained in the operational procedures, once they learnt the procedures and mastered them, the employees soon quit. Retaining them within the organization was very difficult.

The third group of employees that the study focused on were the departments where there was the highest attrition rates. These were the guest service departments (Food and Beverage service, Front Office, Housekeeping) hence had direct association with guest feedbacks. A delay in guest service due to lack of staff caused a negative feedback for the resort.

Resort 2: Mountain View, Conoor: This resort is a leased property hence staff who worked there worked with the resort for shorter time span. They would leave the company within a year or two.

The study also focused on the surging issue of the resort - which was the union which was trying to gain a strong foothold in the resort.

Both these resorts had different problems to handle the issues were difficult for the HR Managers of both the resorts but since they were a part of a chain of properties under the brand name of Evergreen Hotels, an external consultant was called in to provide a suitable solution to overcome the challenges for these resorts. M/s Corporate Solutions head Mr. Swaminathan who has an experience of 40 years working with various chain group of hotels took up this challenge to come up with suitable solution. He had an intense discussions with the all the Managers as well as employee representatives of both the resorts and found the following challenges based upon his discussions:

1. The employee were feeling stagnated as they were not seeing growth in terms of higher responsibilities.
2. Managers in the resorts were not witnessing a positive attitude towards guest service areas hence resulted to rising negative feedbacks.
3. Retaining trained employees were becoming challenge. As the resorts are situated in remote locations, to fill a position was taking at least 3 months for them to do so. Hence manning the resorts throughout the year was becoming a challenge.
4. Employees wanted to change departments, for personal as well as professional reasons. This the employees were not allowed to do so because they needed the skill set and hence had to start from the base level if they opted for a change.
5. Employees were getting associated with union and hence were getting difficult to handle for the managers.

Mr. Swaminathan after listing down the challenges came out with the solution of multiskilling employees, following were the ways that it was brought into the organizations.

1. It was first discussed with the Managers as they were the people who need to make it a continuous ongoing practice hence Mr. Swaminathan convinced the Managers.

2. The long term as well as short term benefits were explained to each of the Managers.
3. They were briefed that the employees were expected to train for a short duration of time in the department of their choice and the hours were to be clocked.
4. The Managers were also asked to impart skill based training to each of the employees who were getting trained in their respective departments.
5. HR Managers and Training Managers were asked to monitor the employees and assess them for certification.
6. Employees were then addressed by Mr. Swaminathan and were taken through presentations to show them that this Multi skilling would help not only to learn new skill set but had multi faceted benefits such as getting certification which would help them to get jobs also in other departments, career growth through internal promotions, empowerment to take decisions at their own level towards better guest satisfactions.
5. No employee was to be allowed to do any training outside their work hours.
6. Employees had to take permission from parent department Manager before moving into the multi-skilling department.
7. Attendance sheets for the multiskilling employees were to be monitored by HR managers.
8. On completion of 50 hrs of training Certificates were to be distributed to the employees during the Town hall meet.
9. Post the basic level certification the employees were to be encouraged to undergo Expert Level Certification.
10. On completion of one department certification, the employees were encouraged to train in another department.

Again movement of employees post expert level certification were to be monitored by the HR Managers.

After the discussions with both the Managers as well as the Employees separately the following were the suggestions made by the consultant.

Basic Level- training of 50 hrs (Certification provided after the completion. Training to be completed in a month's time from the launch of multiskilling)

1. Expert Level- training of 300 hrs (Certification provided post assessment. Training to be completed in 3 months' time post the Basic level certification )

Multiskilling was to be implemented in the following manner:

1. Each of the employees were to be asked to choose a department of their own choice and the level at which they wanted to grow. For this a base level and a Supervisory level were identified for each department.
2. The respective Managers were asked to list down the SOP's for the same.
3. For a base level certification, employees had to mandatorily complete 50 hrs in the respective multi-skilling department.
4. 50 hrs of training were to be split into 25 hrs during non busy periods and 25 hrs during busy periods of multiskilling department.
5. HR Managers were not sure of how to consider multiskilled employees for promotions and departmental transfers.
6. Managers were reluctant to train employees in SOP as well as on the job training as they felt that their time was getting wasted in training of employees.
7. Managers were not able to see a benefit for them, hence were not willing to send employees.
8. Union members felt that it was a tool to cut down employees in the organization.
9. Managers felt it no way was helping in labour movement but only a chaos.

Post the suggestions made by the consultant Mr. Swaminathan, CEO of the company called in for a meeting with the Managers as well as the employees. During the discussion following were the challenges that both the focus groups brought out:

10. Union members felt it to be a means of exploiting employees.

Based on these challenges listed out during the meeting with both the Managers as well as the employees, CEO of the company has been contemplating on how to implement the concept of multiskilling in the organization.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

On conducting the study both the resorts were found to have similar challenges with respect to man power issues. Since both the resorts were strategically located quite far from the nearby cities they had a shortfall of trained employees at all times. Moreover retaining the morale aspect of the old employees was found to be a challenging issue. As per the research done by Mr. Swaminathan head of M/s Corporate Solutions, multiskilling of employees at both the resorts was suggested as the remedy for the man power issues faced at both the resorts. Rather than being introduced directly as a policy change, it was first discussed with both the Managers as well as the employees. It is suggested that it has to be implemented in a phased manner first concentrating on Front Office and Restaurant Service followed by other Guest Interphase departments.

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