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## **LINKING TRAINING PROGRAMS TO SERVICE PERFORMANCE IN HOTEL: A HOTEL INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE**

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### **Abstract**

In the hotel and tourism industry, customer service performance is fundamental in achieving customer satisfaction and loyalty. This study examined the effect of training programs on service performance in restaurants, using four dimensions considered to be key areas for training programs, and these were: customer service training, technical skills training, cross-training programs, and professional development programs. A quantitative research design was undertaken using a data collection approach with an online questionnaire distributed to 128 respondents of 122 hotels in the Eastern Province, Sri Lanka. Reliability analysis revealed that all constructs were reliable with all Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding .70. Results from regression analysis confirmed that there were positive and statistically significant relationships between training programs and service performance ( $R = .712$ ,  $R^2 = .539$ ) and the ANOVA results evidenced that the model was significant ( $F = 69.877$ ,  $p = .000$ ). The regression coefficients were analyzed further and revealed that the strongest effect on service performance was from cross training programs ( $\beta = .898$ ,  $p = .000$ ), followed by professional development programs ( $\beta = .707$ ,  $p = .000$ ), technical skills training ( $\beta = .580$ ,  $p = .000$ ), and customer service training programs ( $\beta = .562$ ,  $p = .000$ ). All four hypotheses were supported, emphasizing the value of complete training and the continuous improvement of training to advance service quality and employee capabilities. The study proposes that organizations focus on cross-training and professional development while assessing training effectiveness on a regular basis so as to advance service results. Future research should focus on the role of HR practices, the role of technology in training, and longitudinal studies which will examine the long-term effects of training on positive employee performance and employee engagement. The study offers hotel and restaurant managers, as well as employees a model for strengthening competitive advantage through training service performance before customer contact and developing employees who benefit organizational development.

## **1.0 Introduction**

Customer service performance is keys to customer satisfaction and loyalty in the Hotel and tourism industries. Customer service ratings in the United States have noticeably improved over the last decade, with the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) reporting an aggregate increase to 80.4 out of 100 in 2022 in the restaurant industry, reflecting the increasing focus on a high level of customer service (ACSI, 2022). Speed of service is measured as being one of the predominant factors in customer satisfaction and service quality, with American fast-food chains now leveraging technology to ensure efficiency; McDonald's reported that implementing self-service kiosks resulted in a 15% increase in customers' order accuracy (Harris, 2021). Evaluations of employee competencies indicate an upward trend driving the profession toward higher standards; for example, training programs designed to advance staff skills result in higher levels of service delivery. Undoubtedly, service performance is becoming increasingly important for the success of businesses in developed economies.

In developing economies, service performance is becoming a critical aspect that local businesses can consider for competitive advantage. In India, customer service performance has increased significantly in local ratings, with a rating of 4.2 stars out of 5 across leading review platforms, such as Google Reviews, Yelp and TripAdvisor, during 2022. Advancements in technology and more applications becoming available, such as mobile ordering apps, have reduced wait times by at least 30%. Employee competency evaluations are becoming more common, with hotels and restaurateurs devoting additional attention and time, and financial resources toward continually improving service quality while improving customer engagement skills. This change also increases customer satisfaction and local economic development from multi-channel expectations for improved business performance. By 2023, customer service ratings began to escalate to a rating of 4.3 stars out of 5, indicating a higher awareness of quality experiences. In addition, evaluations of employee competencies have emerged as part of operational practices that support staff capabilities and service delivery.

Employee training programs are critical to improving service performance in the Hotel space. Training usually varies but a robust training program is usually three to six weeks, depending upon the training need, for the employee to fully develop skill sets. For example, training in customer service may require one to three weeks on core competencies, such as communication, problem-solving and cross-cultural (Baker & Thompson, 2020). The content ranched through the training programs should be associated and provide practical value, through learning extensive theory or doing as per experience. Training sessions should occur continuously at least quarterly or biannually for developing skills and adapting to the changing expectations of customers, as trainings are an important part of improving customer service ratings and improving overall service delivery (Chen & Choi, 2021).

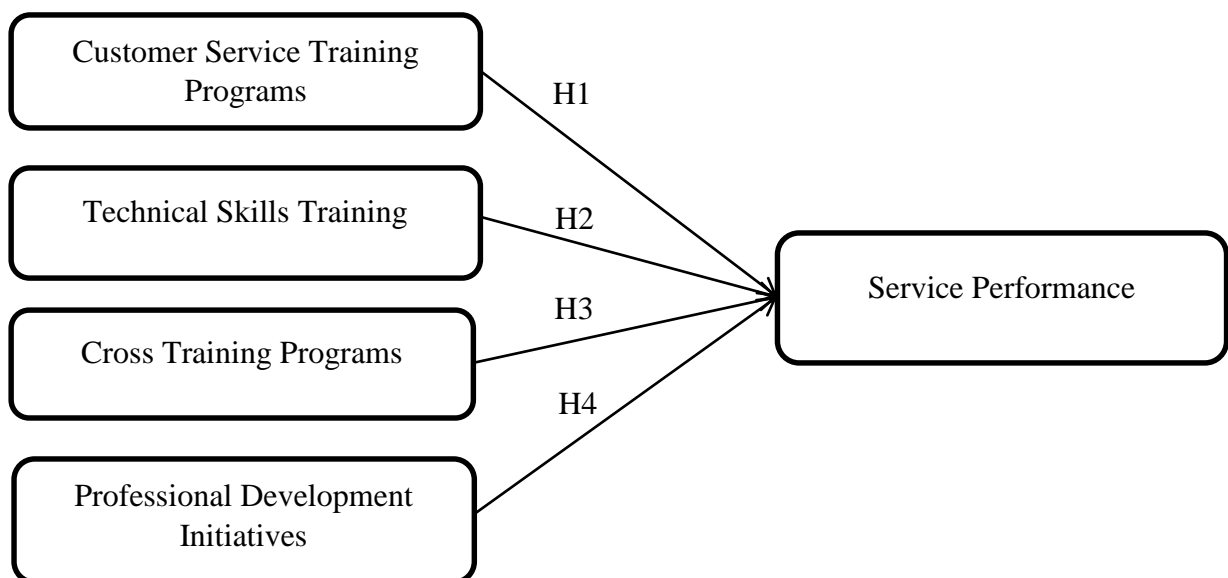
The Hotel industry is a service-prone sector that is bound to face customer-facing interactions. The hotel industry constantly evolves situation throughout digital media, technology, economic and political positioning. Customers' online experiences, like Facebook, Google, etc. will classify the hotel industry's images in the positive or negative category. The key and critical arrangement for enhancing performance and customer satisfaction and to gain a competitive

advantage within the Hotel industry is the requisite skill and development of staff. The online ability to access these experiences anywhere in the world, through these platforms, can have substantial implications for the hotel industry.

This study conducted a detailed analysis of employee training programs that deliver substantial influence on service performance in the Hotel industry. These various training programs support interpersonal skills, service interaction skills, and effective use of technologies. Cross-training programs build employee versatility and operational efficiency while ongoing professional development keeps employees informed about current trends and best practices. Each of these programs results separately in a more capable employee, which leads to an improvement in service performance and customer satisfaction.

## 2.0 Methodology

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



H1: Customer service training programs has impact on service performance

H2: Technical skills training has impact on service performance

H3: Cross training programs has impact on service performance

H4: Professional development initiatives has impact on service performance

### *Population and Sample*

This research selected 254 hotels (Eastern Provincial Council, 2024) as a sample of Sri Lanka's eastern province hotel industry. The population consists of all hotels in the hotel industry, both

graded and ungraded by the Sri Lanka Tourism Board. Quantitative data was collected by examining 122 hotels in Sri Lanka's Eastern region. This research had a comprehensive examination of staff training programs that can have an influence on service performance in the hotel industry. The research selected 128 respondents from 122 hotels.

### ***Data Collection***

The data was collected through a questionnaire that was created online and sent to hotels using their registered email. The respondents included managers, operations managers, chief accountants, assistant accountants, and other senior staff and subordinates from the accounting department, in addition to key staff from the information technology, marketing, and human resources departments. Responses used a 5-point Likert scale. The 26.0 SPSS statistical software was used to test the study hypotheses.

### ***Data Analysis and Discussion***

#### ***Reliability Analysis***

*Table 1: Reliability Analysis*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>No of Items</b>	<b>Cronbach Alpha Value</b>
Customer service training programs	5	0.757
Technical skills training	5	0.723
Cross training programs	5	0.719
Professional development initiatives	5	0.708
Service performance	4	0.756

All constructs used in the study were reliable measures. Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.70 indicates that questions measuring each construct were measuring concepts consistently. Measures of customer service training programs ( $\alpha = 0.757$ ), technical skills training ( $\alpha = 0.723$ ), cross training programs ( $\alpha = 0.719$ ), etc. were all found to be reliable on the different forms of training provided to employees. The measure of service performance ( $\alpha = 0.756$ ) was also a reliable measure. Therefore, responses from employees can be reasonably assumed to represent how various forms of training affect service performance at restaurants (Vardan, 2024; Aslam & Ratnayake, 2021).

**Regression Analysis**

*Table 2: Model Summary*

Model	R	R - Square	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.712	.539	.534	.19126
a. Predictors: (Constant), Training Programs				
b. dependent Variable, service performance				

The study describes a significant positive link between employee training and service performance in restaurants. The R value of the model indicates a strong positive relationship (0.712) between training and service quality. The R-Square value of (0.539, explained 54% of the changes in service performance, representing all changes including the time previously noted it made up 54% of its service performance. Moreover, the time factor and all other factors of, the training alone still accounted for more than 50% of getting off course. Predictions in the model are relatively accurate in meaning that effective training program(s) has a positive effect in improving quality service of employees (Vardan, 2024; Aslam & Ratnayake, 2021).

*Table 3: ANOVA*

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	3.424	1	3.424	169.877	.000b
	Residual	3.289	126	0.49		
	Total	6.724	127			
a. Dependent Variable: Service Performance						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Training Programs						

The ANOVA results are strong in indicating that the regression model explains the relationship between training programs and service performance. The overall model has a F-value of 69.877 (p=0.000), indicating that the regression model is statistically sound and interpretable: it can be concluded that training programs are statistically and meaningfully related to service performance, rather than the results being due to chance. The total variance in service performance is 6.713, and the regression explains 3.424 while the other variance (3.289) is

related to things not captured in this model. In layman's terms, this analysis confirms training programs are meaningful and quantifiable measures of improved service performance in restaurants.

Table 4: Coefficients of regression Analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.143	.102	-	1.421	.000
	Customer service training programs	.146	.043	.562	3.302	.000
	Technical skills training	.142	.039	.580	3.795	.000
	Cross training programs	.415	.028	.898	14.714	.000
	Professional development initiatives	.218	.035	.707	6.000	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Service Performance						

The regression analysis provides compelling evidence that the four training programs examined have a strongly significant and positive effect on service performance in restaurants given that all variables had a p-value of 0.000. Specifically, cross-training programs (Beta = 0.898, t = 14.714) had the strongest effect on service performance, this finding suggests that training employees to perform multiple positions, improves overall service quality to the greatest and strongest degree. Professional development programs (Beta = 0.707, t = 6.000) had the second strongest impact on service performance by helping employees improve their skillsets, develop their careers, and improve their service delivery. Technical skills training (Beta = 0.580, t = 3.795) and Customer service training programs (Beta = 0.562, t = 3.302) both have significant impact, and suggest that providing employees with job specific skills will improve service performance. Overall the findings suggest that the investment in training programs, and specifically cross-training and professional development, improves and strengthens service quality in the restaurant industry (Aslam & Ratnayake, 2021; Vardan, 2024).

### **3.0 Conclusion**

The results of the study provide solid evidence that various types of employee training programs have a significant impact on improving service performance in restaurants. The statistical analysis conducted, including reliability tests, regression and ANOVA, demonstrate that the training initiatives examined in this study were valid, reliable, and provided support for the development of how employees would provide service.

H1: Customer service training programs have an impact on service performance

This hypothesis was supported, providing evidence for customer service training having a significant, positive impact ( $\beta = 0.562$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). This indicates that organizations that implement customer service training in their induction, training, or continuous development phases enhance service quality and service satisfaction when employees are familiar with how to operate/service customers effectively.

H2: Technical skills training has an impact on service performance

This hypothesis is supported as well. Technical skills training had a significant impact ( $\beta = 0.580$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) emphasizing that organizations need to provide employees with operational and specific job skills to reduce or eliminate employee error and provide a better service to customers, while effectively performing to organizations procedures (Cobblah & Van der Walt, 2017).

H3: Cross training programs affect service performance

The analysis provided strong support for this hypothesis. Cross-training was revealed to have the highest effect on service performance ( $\beta = 0.898$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), meaning that when employees are trained across multiple roles, ability to working flexibly and cohesively, as well as overall standards of service, are maximized.

H4: Professional development programs affect service performance

This hypothesis received good support too. Professional development programs showed significant influence ( $\beta = 0.707$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ); suggesting that when organizations commit to investing in long-term employee development, they not only increase employee motivation but also improve service performance.

This study supported all four dimensions of training, with regards to positive and significant effects on service performance in restaurants. Cross-training was noted as the most impactful factor for improvement. This study ultimately emphasizes that ongoing employee commitment for development not only aligns with generic human resource objectives but is far more important, in terms of the business value of quality service and competitive advantage in the restaurant industry (Vardan, 2024; Cobblah & Van der Walt, 2017; Aslam & Ratnayake, 2021).

#### **4.0 Recommendation and future research direction**

Based on the results of this research, it is suggested that restaurants offer thorough training and development programs related to customer service, technical skills, cross-training, and professional development. In particular, cross-training should be the highest priority, since it was shown to have the most significant effect on service performance. As a natural follow-up to training and development, ongoing skill development workshops or refresher courses could be offered on a regular basis to keep employees up to date, and to keep them engaged in the training and contest. More structured professional development programs like mentoring and career path and planning could improve engagement in and ownership of the role entered, and advances the employee's experience with the restaurant and service industry as well as develops skills and opportunities for growth. Further, opportunities for cross-functional experience and rotation of employees in and out of different roles in the restaurant can develop teamwork and flexibility leading to greater service efficiency. It is also important to monitor and evaluate training programs on an ongoing basis through reflective practice and remediation, through observational assessments and customer satisfaction surveys, to ensure continual improvement toward organizational goals.

Future research may include studies on other HR practices such as rewards and recognition and work-life balance, to see their complementary effect on service performance, as well as training. Longitudinal work would help to understand the longer-lasting effects of experiential training on employee performance, retention, and customer satisfaction over time. Future comparative research across different hospitality sectors such as hotels, cafes, and resorts can help to identify sector best practices. Future research can look at the use of technology in the delivery of training, including e-learning via online platforms and the potential use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in modules for a more effective and efficient manner to improve customer service performance. Future research can also examine the interaction effects of training programs and employee engagement strategies on organizational wellbeing and service excellence to develop a more comprehensive understanding of HR practices on restaurant industry performance.

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