SAILING TO SUCCESS: IGNITING EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION FOR EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN THE CRUISE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

Ram Pravesh [1*], Dr. Sidharth S. Raju [2], Dr. Abhinav Mishra [3]

[1] *Research scholar, Department of Hotel Management, Vivekananda Global University, Rajasthan, India*
[2] *Associate Professor, Department of Hotel Management, Vivekananda Global University, Rajasthan, India*
[3] *Senior Lecturer, NCHMCT, Noida, India*

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The changing environment of the cruise hospitality sector places a premium on the relationship between delighted clients and motivated staff members as the primary drivers of business success. This essay digs into the critical link that exists between the happiness of customers and the motivation of employees working in this dynamic industry. It investigates recent trends and techniques with the goal of boosting staff morale, in addition to exploring novel approaches to provide individualized experiences for customers. Cruise lines may plot a road toward continued excellence and financial success by building a connection between the satisfaction of their customers and the motivation of their employees. This research also suggests an ECEEM framework which is designed to align with the unique aspects of the cruise experience. Motivating employees is one of the most effective ways for cruise lines to boost customer satisfaction, which in turn leads to trips that are more enjoyable and life-changing for each and every traveler.

INTRODUCTION

The hospitality business that operates aboard cruise ships is well-known for offering passengers with unforgettable experiences while they are at sea. The symbiotic relationship between delighted clients and personnel who are driven to do their best work is essential to the success of this sector. This article investigates the crucial relationship that exists between the happiness of customers and the motivation of employees working in the hospitality industry of cruise ships, focusing on contemporary trends and techniques.

According to Smith (2021) and Hinkin and Tracey (2010), the success of the hospitality business in the cruise industry, which is known for its one-of-a-kind combination of

luxury and adventure, depends on a harmonic synergy between motivated personnel and satisfied clients. (Smith, 2021; Hinkin & Tracey, 2010; Lee & Hsu, 2013) This study gives a detailed assessment of the fundamental relationship between staff motivation and customer satisfaction in this dynamic industry.

Beginning with an investigation of the two different aspects of motivation intrinsic and extrinsic it emphasizes the necessity of cultivating both in order to keep a highly engaged workforce (Smith, 2021; Hinkin & Tracey, 2010). Intrinsic motivation comes from inside, while extrinsic motivation comes from without. Recent research emphasizes the value of this balanced strategy, highlighting its influence on employee retention and performance (Smith, 2021; Hinkin & Tracey, 2010). These studies highlight the significance of this balanced approach by focusing on its impact on employee retention and performance.

According to Thompson (2022) and Hinkin and Tracey (2010), staff morale may be significantly improved by the use of recognition programs and prizes. According to Thompson (2022) and Hinkin and Tracey (2010), cruise companies are increasingly using new techniques, such as performance-based incentives and customized praises, in order to energize their personnel. Cruise lines are also using these strategies to attract and retain high-quality employees. These programs not only recognize the efforts of specific individuals, but they also foster an environment that values excellence (Thompson, 2022; Hinkin & Tracey, 2010).

In addition, it becomes a strategic need to make an investment in the education and growth of one's workforce (Davenport, 2020; Hinkin & Tracey, 2010). In addition to improving skill sets, it demonstrates a company's commitment to the professional development of its employees (Davenport, 2020; Hinkin & Tracey, 2010). This degree of commitment, in turn, cultivates a sense of belonging and purpose, which drives increased levels of motivation (Davenport, 2020; Hinkin & Tracey, 2010).

According to Kimes (2016), in order to adapt to the constantly shifting environment of customer expectations, cruise lines are increasingly relying on cutting-edge technologies to create more individualized experiences. (Kimes, 2016) says that data-driven insights allow for a greater understanding of visitor preferences, which in turn makes it possible to provide personalised services that connect with

individual wishes. According to Kimes (2016), a personalized approach has a considerable and amplified influence on overall satisfaction levels, which in turn has a dramatic impact on customer loyalty.

According to Kim & Lee, 2015; Hinkin & Tracey (2010), exceptional service is only possible when there is clear and open communication between the personnel and the visitors. The use of digital platforms simplifies interactions and ensures a speedy response to questions and demands. This streamlined communication channel not only improves the overall quality of the guest experience but also enables the employees to more effectively cater to the requirements of individual customers.

Forward-thinking organizations are expanding their engagement initiatives to include the post-cruise period, which extends beyond the actual vacation itself. According to Kim and Prideaux (2012), follow-up surveys and loyalty programs act as conduits for feedback and relationship-building, which helps to nurture long-lasting ties with consumers. According to Kim and Prideaux (2012), making a concentrated effort to maintain the quality of the visitor experience after they have disembarked is

one factor that correlates to long-term consumer loyalty and advocacy.

Hinkin and Tracey (2010) and Lee and Hsu (2013) observed that the level of employee motivation has a direct effect on the quality of the service provided by the company (nexus of these initiatives). Research conducted within the hospitality sector supports this association, demonstrating that a motivated staff is more likely to give great service. These findings were published in Hinkin & Tracey (2010) and Lee & Hsu (2013). According to Hinkin and Tracey (2010) and Lee and Hsu (2013), an increased level of service directly correlates to an increase in the degree of satisfaction experienced by customers.

According to Lee and Hsu (2013), one effective method for boosting the overall quality of the guest experience is to give staff the authority to make decisions and to assume responsibility of their interactions with guests. This autonomy encourages a more customized and upbeat experience for the client, which in turn motivates the staff to go above and beyond in meeting and surpassing the expectations of the guest.

According to Pfeffer (2010), one of the best ways to foster a culture of continuous

improvement is to set up feedback channels inside an organization. These mechanisms should ensure that the suggestions and worries of workers are not only heard but also recognized. This iterative approach fosters improved service quality, which eventually results in a better experience for the visitor and increased levels of satisfaction (Pfeffer, 2010).

According to Smith (2021) and Hinkin and Tracey (2010), the cruise hospitality sector is an excellent example of the symbiotic link that exists between staff motivation and client pleasure. This industry operates in a highly competitive environment. Cruise lines build a positive cycle that propels their performance by emphasizing methods to strengthen staff morale and linking them with customer-centric activities (Smith, 2021; Hinkin & Tracey, 2010). This helps to ensure that morale is high across the company.

OVERVIEW OF THE CRUISE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

Within the larger travel and tourism business, the cruise hospitality industry is a vibrant subset that contributes significantly to overall industry growth. Through the integration of travel, lodging, food,

entertainment, and recreational pursuits aboard a cruise ship, it gives passengers a one-of-a-kind and all-encompassing experience that cannot be found anywhere else. This business has seen substantial growth in popularity over the last several years, and it now draws a wide variety of vacationers who are looking for a variety of experiences, ranging from leisure and luxury to excitement and discovery (Smith, 2020).

Market Size and Growth:

Over the course of the last two decades, the cruise sector has been witnessing persistent expansion. Around thirty million people all across the world went on a cruise holiday in 2019, as reported by the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA). Before the COVID-19 pandemic substantially disrupted travel and tourism industries throughout the world (CLIA, 2021) the industry was headed in the right direction and was making progress.

Impact of COVID-19:

The cruise ship hospitality business was severely impacted when the COVID-19 outbreak occurred. Cruise lines were faced with issues they had never seen before as a result of travel restrictions, fears about the safety of passengers and crew on board, and

massive cancellations. As a response, the industry implemented stricter cleaning procedures, improved ventilation systems, and vaccination regulations for crew members as well as guests (Cruise Industry News, 2021).

Cruise Lines and Fleet Diversity:

The cruise business is distinguished by the presence of a wide variety of cruise lines, each of which caters to a particular subset of the market. The Carnival Corporation, the Royal Caribbean Group, Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings, and MSC Cruises are only few of the major companies in this industry. According to Cruise Market Watch (2021), these businesses operate a wide variety of brands that have a wide range of ship sizes and amenities, ranging from mega-ships that carry thousands of people to smaller, more intimate boats.

Cruise Destinations:

The itineraries of cruise ships visit a diverse range of places, including the well-known ports of call in the Caribbean and the Mediterranean, the untamed landscapes of Alaska, and other far-flung locales such as Australia, Asia, and the Arctic (CLIA, 2021), Additionally, several cruise lines have been investigating developing locations

in order to provide their passengers with experiences that are one-of-a-kind and off the beaten road.

Sustainability and Environmental Concerns:

The cruise industry has shifted its attention to place a greater emphasis on environmentally responsible practices. The cruise industry is making investments in more environmentally friendly technology, such as ships fueled by LNG, sophisticated waste management systems, and shore-based power plants. In addition, many businesses are currently putting into action plans to lessen their reliance on plastics that are only used once and to lessen the impact that they have on the environment (Cruise Industry News, 2021).

Technological Advancements:

The cruise business is becoming increasingly dependent on technology in order to stay competitive. Standardization is occurring in areas such as advanced reservation systems, onboard apps for guest services, and applications based on the internet of things that aim to improve passenger experiences. Additionally, the incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics is contributing to an

increase in the level of personalisation and productivity on board (NAPA, 2021).

Future Trends:

As the sector begins to recover from the effects of the pandemic, a number of variables are expected to have a role in determining its trajectory going forward. These include an increased emphasis on health and safety, a growth in adventure sailing to distant and less-traveled areas, a sustained emphasis on sustainability, and the integration of modern technology to provide a seamless experience for guests (Seatrade Cruise News, 2021).

EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION: A CATALYST FOR SUCCESS

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Both internal and external influences, such as rewards and recognition, can have a role in an employee's level of motivation at the job. Extrinsic motivation includes the use of incentives or recognition from the outside world, whereas intrinsic motivation originates from an individual's own internal goals. Recent research has shown how important it is to cultivate both types of motivation in order to maintain a motivated workforce (Smith, 2021).

Recognition and Rewards

When it comes to boosting employee morale, recognition programs and prizes are two of the most important factors. Now more than ever, cruise lines are embracing forward-thinking practices including performance-based bonuses, employee recognition programs like Employee of the Month, and possibilities for career growth (Thompson, 2022).

Training and Development

Not only can an investment in employee training and development programs result in improved skill sets, but it also indicates a company's dedication to the growth of its workforce. According to Davenport and 2020's research, this provides workers with a sense of belonging and purpose, which has a beneficial effect on the employees' levels of motivation.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION: THE ULTIMATE GOAL

Personalized Services

In this day and age of individualized experiences, cruise lines are relying on cutting-edge technologies and data analytics to better comprehend the preferences of their passengers. According to Kimes (2016),

increasing the degree to which services are adapted to the specific requirements and preferences of individual customers greatly boosts overall satisfaction levels.

Seamless Communication

It is essential for there to be good communication between the employees and the guests. According to Kim and Lee (2015), cruise companies are increasingly turning to digital platforms in order to expedite interactions between guests and personnel and to ensure timely replies to inquiries and requests.

Post-Cruise Engagement

The cruise experience doesn't finish when you get off the ship, either. According to Kim and Prideaux (2012), forward-thinking businesses are beginning to use post-cruise engagement techniques, such as follow-up surveys and loyalty programs, in order to collect feedback from clients and establish long-lasting connections with them.

THE NEXUS: EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Employee Engagement and Service Quality

According to research conducted by Hink in and Tracey (2010), there is a one-to-one connection between the level of employee engagement and the quality of service provided in the hospitality business. It is far more probable that a motivated team will give great service, which will lead to increased levels of customer satisfaction.

Empowerment and Autonomy

It is possible to provide a more individualized and satisfying experience for customers by delegating decision-making authority to workers and encouraging them to accept personal responsibility for their interactions with guests. According to Lee and Hsu (2013), empowered staff are more likely to go the additional mile to satisfy the requirements of their guests.

Employee Feedback Loops

Establishing feedback channels in which the ideas and concerns of employees are appreciated contributes to the development of a culture of continuous improvement. According to Pfeffer (2010), this results in an improved experience for the guests as well as increased levels of overall satisfaction.

CHALLENGES FACED BY CRUISE COMPANIES FOR EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION

The cruise industry encountered a number of obstacles while attempting to motivate its workforce. The following are some of the widespread difficulties:

Pandemic-Related Concerns:

- **Health and Safety:** A big obstacle was presented in the form of ensuring the health and safety of personnel amidst the COVID-19 outbreak. The implementation of stringent health procedures and the provision of protective equipment was necessary, but it also presented a challenge (Cruise Lines Association, 2021).

Uncertainty and Job Insecurity:

- **Crew Repatriation:** Crew members faced lengthy contracts, uncertainty regarding repatriation, and isolation from their families as a result of travel restrictions and port closures, all of which had the potential to contribute to demotivation and burnout. (Johnson, 2020).

Restricted Onboard Activities:

- **Limited Entertainment and Facilities:** Because of restrictions on capacity and social distancing measures, there were less opportunities for amusement, and access to facilities was restricted, which may have had an impact on staff morale. (Smith, 2021).

Reduced Guest Interaction:

- **Social Distancing Measures:** Although it is essential for safety reasons, keeping a physical barrier between personnel and customers might result in less chances for employees and customers to form personal connections and recognize each other (International Maritime Organization, 2020).

Challenges in Training and Development:

- **Virtual Training:** The transition to the use of virtual training techniques for onboarding and skill development was fraught with difficulties, particularly for hands-on professions such as those in the service and maintenance departments. (Brown, 2019).

Crew Well-Being and Mental Health:

- **Isolation and Stress:** Long stretches at sea, during which crew members are cut off from frequent communication with their loved ones and friends, in addition to the inherent unpredictability of the environment, may contribute to feelings of alienation and stress in those serving on the crew (Cruise Industry News, 2021).

Cultural and Language Differences:

- **Diverse Workforce:** Cruise Companies frequently seek for potential employees from a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds to fill open positions. It might be difficult to maintain good communication while still maintaining a harmonious working atmosphere. (Anderson, 2018).

Job Redundancy and Staffing Adjustments:

- **Reduced Crew Sizes:** As a result of social estrangement, a number of cruise lines cut the number of crew members working on their ships. This resulted in higher workloads, which may have contributed to a sense of being overworked among the surviving workers.

Limited Career Advancement Opportunities:

- **Restricted Mobility:** According to Cruise Business Review (2021), travel limitations and port closures reduced the number of options for professional progression and cross-training, which may have contributed to workers' perceptions of being stuck in their current positions.

Maintaining Morale and Motivation:

- **Keeping Spirits High:** According to Cruise Business Review 2021, for management to be successful in maintaining a good and motivated work environment in the midst of constant problems, uncertainties, and limits, creative ways were necessary.

Balancing Employee and Guest Safety:

- **Ensuring Compliance:** It could be a challenging effort for cruise lines to find the sweet spot between offering a satisfying experience for passengers and following all of the necessary safety procedures.

ECEEM FRAMEWORK FOR EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION IN CRUISE COMPANIES

via the implementation of an Enhanced Cruise Experience via staff Motivation (ECEEM) Framework, cruise businesses have the ability to cultivate a good working environment that encourages high levels of staff engagement. This, in turn, leads to increased levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty:

Cruise Immersion Training (CIT)

- **Objective**: Immerse employees in a simulated cruise environment during onboarding.
- **Benefits:** Increases crew confidence and ensures seamless guest direction by acquainting them with the ship's layout, its facilities, and the procedures for handling emergencies..

Cruise Storytelling Sessions (CSS)

- **Objective:** Give your staff the opportunity to talk about their own experiences with various cruise ports.
- **Benefits:** Enriches guest encounters by providing genuine insights, which

helps to develop deeper connections and enhances the story experienced on board.

Dynamic Role Exchange (DRE)

- **Objective:** To get a comprehensive grasp of ship operations, it is important to facilitate cross-training within departments.
- **Benefits:** Encourages empathetic behavior, cooperation, and a sense of oneness among staff members, which leads to more effective collaboration and problem-solving.

Guest-Centric Innovation Forum (GCIF)

- **Objective:** Inspire your staff to come up with creative solutions that will improve the overall experience for your customers.
- **Benefits:** Promotes a culture of continual development, which results in creative initiatives centered on the enjoyment of the guests and increased visitor retention.

Captain's Crew Recognition (CCR)

- **Objective:** Establish a program in which the captain takes the time to

personally recognize exceptional members of the crew.

- **Benefits:** Raise the morale of the staff, emphasize the significance of each position, and foster a feeling of pride in the fact that the staff is contributing to the happiness of the guests.

Destination Discovery Challenge (DDC)

- **Objective:** Create a contest with the objective of getting staff interested in and knowledgeable about forthcoming cruise locations.
- **Benefits:** Staff members are provided with in-depth expertise, which enables them to provide visitors with individualized advice and insights.

Culinary Fusion Workshop (CFW)

- **Objective:** Encourage collaboration between the different culinary teams in order to come up with original fusion cuisine.
- **Benefits:** demonstrates an inventive approach to cuisine, offering customers a memorable dining experience and a flavorful sampling of the world's many cultures.

Wellness Warriors Initiative (WWI)

- **Objective:** Through the use of wellness challenges and tools, you may encourage holistic well-being among your workforce.
- **Benefits:** Ensures that employees exude good energy and motivates visitors to make self-care a priority in order to foster a culture of vitality.

Captain's Circle of Insight (CCI)

- **Objective:** Maintain frequent forums in which staff may discuss the thoughts and comments received from guests.
- **Benefits:** Improves communication, helps foster a culture that is motivated by feedback, and gives employees the ability to work together to find solutions to problems.

Sustainability Champions (SC)

- **Objective:** Appoint members of the crew to the role of sustainability ambassadors so that they may teach guests about environmentally responsible behaviors.
- **Benefits:** Resonates with visitors who are concerned of their impact on

the environment and demonstrates the company's dedication to environmental responsibility.

CONCLUSION

In the post-pandemic age, the hospitality business, which includes cruise ships, is positioned to rebound and experience a rebirth. Cruise lines are in an excellent position to present passengers with once-in-a-lifetime experiences on the high seas as a result of their recent recommitment to safety, environmental responsibility, and technological advancement.

The importance of the symbiotic link between the motivation of employees and the happiness of customers in the highly competitive landscape of the cruise hospitality sector cannot be overstated. Cruise lines may generate a positive feedback loop that drives their performance by giving more priority to methods that boost staff morale and linking those strategies with activities that are focused on the client.

A deliberate effort from leadership, managers, and HR employees is required to implement the proposed ECEEM framework. However, cruise companies may increase visitor satisfaction by concentrating

on the motivation of their workforce, which in turn creates trips that are memorable and enriching for each and every passenger. The efficacy of this strategy relies heavily on consistent evaluation and modification in response to feedback and performance measures. In the long run, cruise firms may eventually improve the customer experience and increase customer loyalty if they place a priority on motivating their employees.

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