Case Study: Starwood Hotels & Resorts

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**Introduction**

This case study explores learning and development at Starwood Hotels and Resorts. Tools and technology, analytics, competencies, job roles, and future directions for learning at Starwood are discussed. A discussion of the maturity of the learning function concludes the study.

**Description of Organization**

Starwood Hotels and Resorts belongs to the hosipitality industry and operates over 1,500 hotels in 100 countries (Marriott International, Inc., 2018). Starwood works as one organization that provides hotel accomodations using multiple brands (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018). Starwood strives to create a “home away from home” for guests (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018). The Starwood employs over 100,000 employees to ensure that hotel operations meet this standard (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018).

The global learning & development department (GLDD) supported the learning function for operational staff at Starwood brands (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018). Learners included front desk staff, housekeepers, and managers (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018). Before the Subject Matter Expert's tenure, each individual hotel handled the learning function (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018). During the centralization of learning and development function, a learning committee approved learning projects and served as the gatekeeper of the Learning Management System (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018). Individual hotels pushed back in order to “do their own thing” (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018). Fortunately, senior management championed this change and supported the learning committee model (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018).

**Case Study Data**

The case study discussion starts with a discussion about tools, technology, and analytics. The Cornerstone Learning Management System provided registration for Instructor Led Courses and access to on-demand eLearning modules (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018). GLDD used ADDIE methodology for course development (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018). Kirkpatrick Level I surveys were consistently used to evaluate training effectiveness (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018). Planning included focus groups with managers and learners to take place three to six months after training (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018). However, these focus groups were not consistently held (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018).

GLDD supported the job roles of front desk staff, housekeepers, and management (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018). Job competencies were not maintained consistently across Starwood (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018). Hiring decisions were made managers on a site-by-site basis as no organizational standards existed around competencies (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018). Starwood did not view a multigenerational or diverse workforce as a challenge (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018). The organization embraced change and staffers were flexible about working with colleagues in different time zones (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018).

The global learning audience as well as the fast pace of the hospitality industry requires on-demand learning delivery (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018). GLDD considered the following changes for future development:

* Moving from instructor led training to virtual and on-demand e-learning,
* Including mobile-ready, video micro-learning in the learning catalog,
* Issuing tablets to housekeeping staff with just-in-time micro-lessons,
* Implementing a system to capture and report on Return on Investment data, and
* Exploiting social media as part of the learning strategy (J. Alexander, personal communication, March 16, 2018).

**Analysis of Learning and Development Maturity**

Using the Case study stages of learning and development capability/maturity (2013), the student author ranks Starwood’s GLDD at stage 2 as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1

*Stage of L&D Maturity Matrix Analysis*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Stage 2 Criteria** | **Evidence Per J. Alexander** (personal communication, March 16, 2018) |
| Organization LMS  eLearning Competency Model | Cornerstone Learning Management System |
| T&D Excellence | Central learning committee vets the quality of learning projects |
| Quantitative & Qualitative | Use of Kirkpatrick Level I evaluations |
| Change Readiness | The hospitality industry forces GLDD to adapt to the fast pace of a changing business environment |
| Planned | Central learning committee vets the quality of learning projects |
| Consolidation of Operations | A centralized learning and development organization serves as the gatekeeper for new projects and Learning Management System content |
| Information | Learning focus on operational topics such as how to make a bed or the correct cleaning supplies to use for cleaning a room. |

References

Case study stages of learning and development capability/maturity. (2013).

Marriott International, Inc. (2018). Travel inside the world of SPG [Web Page]. Retrieved from https://www.starwoodhotels.com/preferredguest/about/index.html?categoryId=brand.benefits.overview