

# ORAVA MUSEUM, DOLNY KUBIN, SLOVAKIA

## Strategies For Improving Staff Motivation

### Introduction

Orava Museum in Dolný, Kubín ranks among the oldest museums in Slovakia. It first opened its doors in 1868. Orava Museum focuses on documenting living conditions and social development in the whole Orava region. It comprises ten institutions, seven of which are national cultural heritage sites. The Orava Castle has a long history and is situated above the Orava River on a 112m rock face. Other institutions that form an important part of the Orava museum include Biblioteka Caploviciana; P. O. Hviezdoslav Literary Museum in Dolný Kubín; House of Theo Florin; the Dyer in Dolný Kubín; exhibition of the Gamekeeper's Wife in Oravská Polhora; and the Orava Forest Railway that has returned to operation after 30 years inactivity.

This case study focuses on Orava Castle and tourism-related services provided by the museum situated in the castle. Apart from the historical guided tour of Orava Castle, customers are invited to participate in various cultural and educational events as well as marketing activities. Some of these cultural and educational events include the Folk Costume and Customs Parade; National Museum Day, Night time tours of Orava Castle, St. Nicholas Days, and Christmas at Orava Castle. Besides these activities, the museum organises various events according to client requirements, including classical or medieval music performances; meetings with castle personalities; wedding ceremonies and receptions; historic evening programmes, and music and social events in the Art Nouveau building below the castle.

Orava Museum is an endowment organisation. It receives funding from the regional government which covers up to 40% of the museum's expenses. Other funding sources include business activities, grants and sponsorship. The funds raised are mostly used for the conservation of historical monuments and the motivation and development of employees.

In 2007, Orava Castle was visited by 189,000 visitors from 25 countries. During the peak summer season the castle welcomed about 2,000 visitors daily to the castle. A visitor profile yields the following statistics:

- Adults 48.67 %
- Children, students, seniors, disabled 40.67 %
- Children up to 6 years 10.66 %

According to the museum director, a certain share of attendance also belongs to those attending events at Orava Castle. Last year Orava Castle hosted a total of 25 events.

## **Human Resource Strategy and Practices**

Orava Museum employs 55 full-time employees. Many employees are highly specialised professionals, for example, ethnographers, historians, archivists, geologists, renovators, archaeologists, zoologists, botanists and preservers. Other professional working in the castle include security and maintenance staff, cleaners, a marketing manager, a project manager and an economist. The majority of employees are 30-40 years. Staff turnover is very low, with only 4 employees having left the organisation in the last 5 years. In the summer season the museum employs 80 guides, mostly students.

The principal approach to human resource management includes fostering teamwork, encouraging employee empowerment and responsibility, and supporting employee creativity. This HR approach aligns with the museum's mission to improve the quality of research, services and economic performance. Marketing, customer service, and tourist activities are becoming more important for the economic performance of the museum and this is significantly influencing HR interventions at the museum.

The human resources planning process takes place annually in the month of June. At this time, the museum reviews its performance and develops a plan for the following 12 months. Once formulated, the plan is discussed and approved by museum management. The human resources planning process is an important element of the 4-year strategic programming and budgeting process.

Responsibility for employee performance management lies with heads of departments. Employees receive regular feedback on their work as part of the everyday relationship between superiors and subordinates. A formal performance review is carried out twice a year and a written record of the review is filed. The performance review process is used for remuneration, placement and training and development purposes and acts as a stimulus for performance improvement and employee motivation.

Employee wages comprise a basic fixed element and a flexible element. The flexible component varies and can make up approximately 22% of an employee's total salary. The level of flexible remuneration depends upon the performance assessment of the immediate superior. The salaries offered to museum employees are generally lower than the average wage level in the national economy due to tight museum budgets. Consequently, other means of employee motivation need to be found apart from financial incentives. It is notable that museum staff view their job as a vocation, with motivation frequently taking the form of high levels of satisfaction, task accomplishment, social acknowledgement or praise and recognition from management. Employees also receive various indirect benefits. The museum subsidizes travel to work costs, holiday costs and attendance at various sport and cultural events.

Some employees operate in multi-tasking roles (e.g. guide – cashier, marketing assistant – communication manager, shop assistant – guide). These employees do not have separate employment contracts for these additional tasks; the additional roles are rewarded by means of premium and bonus payments. Employees are invited and encouraged to attend various training workshops or courses as well as professional conferences in order to improve their professional knowledge and skills. Development plans for employees are prepared at the end of a given calendar year. This forms the basis for identifying appropriate courses and workshops for employees. These plan also provide data on the scientific and research training needs of the museum. Funding for employee training comes from the museum's revenue generating activities.

### **The Recruitment and Motivation of Seasonal Employees**

As previously mentioned, the museum engages 80 guides for the peak season. This influences human resources management practices in the museum. During the peak summer season, 60% of employees are seasonal employees, in the form of guides. These employees require a specific HR approach in relation to recruitment, induction, development, performance management and employee motivation.

Guides are employed for the summer season, mostly from July to August. The recruitment and selection process usually takes place in March and April. This process begins by sifting through approximately 120 – 130 applications for guiding every year. Shortlisted candidates are then invited for interview. The interview panel is composed of 5-7 members and focuses mostly on the personality, communication skills and language skills of applicants. Successful applicants then receive training and must also pass tests examining their knowledge of guiding texts related to the history of the castle.

To improve the motivation and performance of guides, the museum has implemented a "Best guide of the month" award. A committee of about 10 people assesses the guides' work every month. The assessment also takes into account the views of external evaluators who attend tours as mystery shoppers to assess the performance of guides. The assessment of guides does not yet take a strictly systematic form as not all evaluators are trained to carry out the assessment. The criteria for evaluation are behaviour/communication, group-work, language skills and visitor responsiveness. It is anticipated that a structured form of assessment/evaluation will be developed in the near future. The managing director describes the benefits of reviewing the performance of guides in the following terms:

*Even though the views of some evaluators are not impartial, we have not yet found a better guide evaluation method. We believe this method is useful in motivating guides, because it generates competition amongst them and everyone tries to be the best. Furthermore, we receive feedback from visitors, who send us thank you e-mails or draw attention to deficiencies.*

Following the guide evaluation, guides may be publically acknowledged for their performance, and may receive a 10% salary bonus. Guides also receive four free tickets for family members to visit any exhibition of the Orava Museum if they receive a positive evaluation. Successful guides also have the possibility to continue working for the Orava Castle without a selection procedure for the next season.

At the end of the season all guides are shown private areas of the Orava Castle, which for various reasons are not accessible to the public. This tour takes place under the supervision of the castle historian.

### **Conclusion**

The Orava Museum is a state funded organisation and has a long tradition dating back to 1868. This case study focused on the approach to human resources management adopted by Orava Castle, one of the museum's institutions. Management focus on teamwork, empowerment, responsibility and creativity as core elements of the human resource strategy. Human resource plans are developed every year and training plans are

developed and adjusted on the basis of performance evaluations that take place every two months.

Due to the high number of visitors during the summer season the museum employs about 80 guides for Orava Castle, most of whom are students. Guides constitute about 60% of museum employees during the peak season. To support high quality guiding services and employee motivation, management have implemented a "Best Guide of the Month" award. The performance of guides is assessed by means of a mystery shopping exercise and key criteria include behaviour/communication, group-work, language skills and visitor responses.