

AN EXPLORATORY OVERVIEW AND COMPARISON OF LODGING TECHNOLOGY DECISION MAKERS' PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine perspectives on technology initiatives and issues between decision makers who are non-IT managers and IT-managers in the U. S. lodging industry. Creating an optimal workplace for better communication and collaboration amongst these key decision makers is essential for successful deployment of technology initiatives. Findings suggest that there are differing perspectives about technology initiatives and issues between the abovementioned two populations even though they work for the same industry. IT-managers expressed more positive opinions than non-IT managers when it comes the deployment of technology initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

As a dynamic subset of the hospitality industry, the U.S. lodging industry includes over 52,000 U. S. hotel chains with more than 4,900,000 rooms according to the 2014 lodging industry profile provided by AH&LA [1]. To survive in this highly competitive environment, hoteliers inevitably pay attention to their guests' needs, including technology supported services and amenities [2] [9]. Technology, as a value-added service, cannot be ignored by hotel organizations that are attempting to gain a competitive advantage [2] [4]. Recognizing the fact that more and more advanced technologies are becoming part of a person's daily life, some researchers point out that having high-tech services and amenities that meet the guests' expectations plays a critical role for enhancing travelers' experience during a hotel stay [2] [3] [4]

Given the benefits of improving service through technology, hoteliers have started to allocate more of their budget on technology initiatives [8]. However, previous research indicates that decision makers involved in technology initiatives do not always see eye to eye when it comes to priorities, i.e., CIO's versus CEO's [5] [6]. Depending on the position and role of decision makers in an organization (i.e. non-IT Managers versus IT-managers), differing perspectives might hinder the planning and implementation of technology initiatives [7]. It is often speculated that there are differing perspectives when it comes to technology initiatives amongst hotel executives. Yet, no study has offered an examination and comparison of the technology perspectives of two key groups of hotel technology decision makers: those who oversee the overall management of hotels – including technology purchase decisions - (e.g., CEO, GM, etc.) versus those whose particular expertise is in management of technology – including the influence on technology purchase decisions (e.g. CIO, Director of Technology, etc.).

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this exploratory study is to examine perspectives on technology initiatives and issues between non-IT managers and IT professionals/managers in the U. S. lodging industry. By examining and documenting possible differences in perceptions and opinions of the two key groups of technology decision makers, this study aims to create a momentum and dialog for better communication and collaboration amongst these key decision makers while offering a direction for future research.

RESULTS

Top Priorities on Technology Upgrades

Respondents were asked to indicate their top priorities for technology upgrades. Both groups of decisions makers agree that leveraging mobile solutions for customer facing applications and adding bandwidth are high priorities when it comes to upgrades, whereas respondents of the two groups indicated differing perspectives about preparing for changes in payment technology (See Table 1). Overall, IT-managers clearly view preparing for changes in payment technology as a higher priority in comparison to those who are non-IT managers. Surprisingly, the perspective on creating secure frameworks for data is quite the opposite between the two groups of decision makers.

Table 1. Ranking of Company’s Top Priorities on Technology Upgrades

Technology Initiative	Non IT Managers	IT Professionals /Managers
Developing a digital strategy	5 th (shared)	7 th
Adding bandwidth	2 nd	3 rd
Creating a secure framework for data	3 rd	6 th
Preparing for changes in payment technology	4 th	1 st
Leveraging mobile solutions for employee facing applications	6 th	5 th
Leveraging mobile solutions for customer facing applications	1 st	2 nd
Migrating solutions to the cloud	5 th (shared)	4 th
Others	7 th	8 th

Importance of IT Talent

The two groups of decision makers (i.e., IT Professionals/Managers vs. Non IT Managers) agreed that ‘ability to analyze and problem solve’ is one of the most important IT talent for their organizations while non-IT professionals/managers selected having ‘technical expertise’ as the most important IT talent (See Table 2).

Table 2. Ranking of Most Important IT Talent

IT Talent	Non IT Managers	IT Professionals /Managers
Ability to analyze & problem solve	2 nd	1 st
Familiarity with technology enabled	3 rd	5 th
Technical expertise	1 st	3 rd
Familiarity with business strategies	6 th (shared)	6 th
Expertise in budgeting	6 th (shared)	8 th

Ability to manage complex integrations	5 th	4 th
Experience in managing outsourced IT	6 th (shared)	7 th
Willingness to be proactive in solving problems	4 th	2 nd

Perceptions on Big Data

Big data has become one of the important topics in the hospitality industry. Technology is increasingly enabling hoteliers to effectively document transactions and track guests' behavior. Through effective use of above-property and advanced enterprise systems, the lodging industry is capable of capturing more data about their guests than ever before. For the purposes of this study, "Big Data" was defined as "information assets that are high in volume, velocity and variety that, when captured, stored and analyzed through advanced techniques, can provide enhanced insight and decision making". The survey respondents were provided with the above definition and then asked what they are using Big Data for (See Table 3).

Table 3. Ranking of Perceptions on Big Data Usage

Big Data Uses	Non IT Managers	IT Professionals /Managers
Advanced reporting	3 rd	3 rd
Identifying trends	1 st (shared)	1 st
Predictive analysis	1 st (shared)	2 nd

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study documented the perception and opinion differences between hospitality non-IT managers and IT-managers. The results demonstrated that there are indeed different opinions about technology issues and initiatives between the two groups even though they work for the same industry.

A review of related literature indicates the need to further study the differences in perspectives between two key decision making groups when it comes to lodging technology. This study serves as a preliminary attempt to document the differences. Future studies should focus on this aspect, and find out the underlying reasons for the differences.

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