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EVALUATION OF ETHICS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS IN SERVICE SECTOR[1]

ABSTRACT

The foundation of the public relations profession is to mediate between the activities of the enterprises and the society they are in contact with. Especially in the service sector, the public relations department and the employees who are in direct contact with the customer should be sensitive to ethics.

The service sector is entirely based on the human factor and in this industry, human relations, behaviours and cultural differences gain importance in the functioning of the sector. Company employees in the service sector should come to the forefront with the adoption of the principles of honesty, the confidentiality of the information about the customers and their reliability.

In this study, the literature review is made in order to determine the difficulties encountered in the applications of tourism area which has a wide scope in the service sector. Besides, a conceptual assessment and a framework for the development of professional ethical principles have been established.

Managers have important duties in the service sector. In order to maximize customer satisfaction, the motivation of the employees who are in contact with the customer at any time must be well provided. Ethical rules fall also to customers. Starting from the advertisements made by the service sector, the customers must make feedback in order to inform the relevant units about unethical behaviours such as the quality of the service received, the attitudes of the managers and employees.

Keywords: Service sector, Public Relations, Ethics, Tourism Page.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Concept of Ethics

Beliefs, values, norms and prohibitions that shape the life of society throughout history constitute the concept of morality (Ozlem, 2004). On the other hand, ethics which is said as professional morals should be understood as the rules of conduct that should be applied in that profession. Everyone is required to comply with these rules wherever they are (Kucuradi, 2000). The term ethics in business life is replaced by the term morals and is used as a code of morals. Ethics, which is directly linked to laws and codes of ethics; is in integrity with the concepts of justice, responsibility, law etc. Primarily, the boards of law encompass the superiority of human life, personal immunity and protection of the right to property. Unethical behaviour may not be considered a crime under the law. Therefore, ethical behaviour is not only related to legal responsibilities (Davran, 2000).

It is the main line of ethics that every human authority fulfils its duties in a beneficial way for humanity. Ethical behaviour is an important factor in training straightforward, honest, and hardworking people, who do not harm their environment and abuse their profession and are responsible. Ethics, environment, management, business, press, politics, public relations ethics and similar concepts that are necessary for every field of business may be similar when they meet in common areas and sometimes may show conflicts (Tepe, 2000).

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Ethics is not arbitrary. Ethics, which is an indispensable element for human beings, should not be transformed into an ideology and a certain philosophy of life for the intended purpose. Professional ethics should be defined as an activity in which good faith is at the forefront, and it has a moral code based on knowing what the practitioner should or should not do (Koslovski, 2000:40).

Although there are unique ethical values in different occupational fields, general ethical rules can be listed as follows (Akarsu, 1998);

In terms of competence: It is aimed to provide the best service.

In terms of honesty: Honesty and faithfulness are accepted as the basic principle in the scientific and professional service process.

Sensitivity and Tolerance: Satisfaction of the people in contact with good human relations.

Professional and Scientific Responsibility: In accordance with the rules of the profession being, practised, adherence to and responsibility for the standard ethical rules is adopted.

General Ethical Rules: Ethics does not produce morality, but ethics speaks about morality to determine the existence of what is good rather than what is good.

1.2. Possible Consequences of Unethical Behaviour

Ethical studies are ongoing in the world to find the right behaviours that are accepted by all. Although these studies continue, unethical behaviours are observed and such behaviours have negative consequences for individuals and businesses. The prominent results of unethical behaviours in the service sector can be listed as follows:

1. The customer reacts when he/she is exposed to or feels unethical behaviour, and his/she terminates his/her relationship with the business.

2. Negative information and advertisements spread between customers affect the activities of the enterprises.

3. Negative thinking of the customer causes more damage to the business by a chain effect.

4. Unethical behaviour will lead to a decrease in sales in the future.

5. Hiding unethical behaviours among business employees cause to problems in coordination processes and as a result of this, negative behaviours and disagreements occur among employees.

6. Unethical behaviour may lead to a decrease in the quality of service, increase of absenteeism of employees and an increase in costs.

7. When the negative relationship between the customer and the company occurs and as a result, a legal process is started, the company may have consequences such as compensation payment and loss of prestige.

8. Reduced productivity and increased costs due to wrong method and management.

9. As a result of unethical behaviours, the employees of the company may become defensive both themselves and their institutions.

The conditions necessary for the implementation of total ethical management in tourism enterprises can be listed as follows: clearly defined business values, pre-determined ethical strategy, tools and objectives, ethical policy and process, the existence of measurement methods of ethical effectiveness and principles to act ethically in decision making (Pirnar, 2000). In addition, rewarding ethical behaviour, supporting ethical behaviours within the organization, existence of ethical leadership practices, having activities to evaluate the impact of ethical practices, providing ethical training and respecting the personal values of employees are also necessary for ethical management.

2. ETHICS IN TOURISM

Unethical behavior can be encountered in all sectors, whether it is the production or service sectors. In labor-based enterprises such as the service sector, those who do not comply with the code of ethics are

more common in terms of employees. Tourism, which has the highest share in the service sector, is an area where ethical rules should be paid the most attention. The fact that the personnel and the customer are always in communication increases the importance of professional ethics in order to maintain the quality of service (Unluonen and Arslan, 2012).

The tourism sector has a structure that constitutes a source of income in many countries around the world. In this human-based sector, public relations and intercultural differences are of great importance in the functioning of the tourism sector (Guler, 2005: 138).

Tourism is an important solution tool in economic problems of a country. In this sector which has a high economic return, human behaviours are effective with their rights and wrongs. The fact that it is a labour-based sector and the contact of people with each other on a service-based basis emphasizes once again the importance of codes of conduct.

The development of tourism and its impact on global dimensions is increasing day by day. In this context, the effects reflected on the environment and societies depend on the close relationship of international tourism with many areas (Kozak and Aslan, 2005: 34).

It should be discussed how ethical values in the tourism sector will reflect on enterprises in the long and short term. Even if a company that does not care about ethical values does not experience any problems in the short term, it may face difficulties in the long term. In the long term, if the code of ethics is not respected both for the customer and the employees, the prestige of the enterprise may be damaged, the respect of the employees to the work and the enterprise will be reduced, intercultural interaction will be damaged and the business will be exposed to many negative effects (Akova, 2008; 5).

Considering the ethical rules, which are examined by many researchers from different perspectives, for the tourism sector, common values can be listed as follows (Haynes, 2002);

- To be respectful, honest and neutral to people,

- To attach importance to justice, equality and freedom,

- To avoid harm and to prevent damage,

- To respect the rights of secrecy and privacy,

- To respect the value and holiness of life,

- Fulfil the promise,

- To be responsible.

3. ETHICAL STANDARDS OF WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION

Although the World Tourism Organization (WTO) conducts activities in many regions based on the development of the tourism sector, it also works to increase the applicability of international ethical rules. The World Tourism Organization (WTO), whose statute was issued on 27 September 1970, operates under the United Nations. The World Tourism Organization, which consists of experts selected from ministries or tourism organizations in each country, has been approved by Turkey with the law dated 17.06.1973 and numbered 1768 (Dolmaci and Bulgan, 2013).

At the general meeting held in Istanbul for the first time in 1997, it was asked to determine the "Principles of Global Tourism Ethics". In April 1999, 114 countries, including Turkey, came together at the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development in New York, where the text prepared by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) was edited.

On October 1, 1999, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) adopted a Declaration of Global Ethics in Tourism consisted of 10 articles in order to sustain the development of world tourism. These principles are (Yazicioglu ve Boylu, 2003);

- The contribution of tourism to mutual respect and understanding between people and societies,

- Tourism as an individual and collective satisfaction tool,

- Tourism as a continuous development factor,

- Tourism as an activity that benefits from and enriches the common cultural heritage of humanity,

- Tourism as a useful activity for host countries and communities,

- The obligations of investors in the development of tourism,

- The right to tourism,

- Freedom of touristic movement,

- Rights of tourism employees and entrepreneurs,

- The applicability of global ethical principles to tourism.

The main purpose of these principles is; in national and international tourism, to consider rights and freedoms; to develop the tourism sector without making any distinctions on race, language, religion etc. (Kozak and Guclu, 2006: 67).

The tenth article of the Declaration is the Application of Global Ethical Principles in Tourism. This article has linked the recognition of the World Tourism Organization and other international organizations on issues including the environment, human rights and health, together with the public and private sectors acting together in the tourism sector. In addition, the adoption of the World Committee on Ethical Principles in Tourism, which is independent in the elimination of problems that may arise in the implementation of ethical principles, has been made compulsory.

4. ETHICAL PROBLEMS IN TOURISM ENTERPRISES

Changes in social structure, different understandings, economic changes, inadequate regulation of norms in business and injustice cause unethical behaviors (Gul, 2006). Besides, dissatisfaction for employees triggers loss of performance and motivation. The unethical behaviors generally seen in the enterprises can be listed as follows (Gul, 2006):

- Discrimination: To provide more opportunities by protecting the rights of a group.

- Favouritism: Informal priority of sensuality and commitment.

- Bribery: Employees' financial and moral benefits.

- Benefit and Acquaintance: Forms of intimacy and sincere treatment of superior authorities without goodwill.

- Bigotry: Individuals or groups have attitudes and behaviours that show that their truth is dominant.

- Preventive and Misleading: Misinforming and misleading in the conduct of work.

- Selfishness: Managers or employees prioritize their interests.

- Intimidation: An attempt to influence people or groups outside the legal limits of the managers.

- Violence - Compulsion: • Violence - Coercion: A negative emotional overflow that occurs due to the feeling of helplessness resulting from the belief and fear that there is nothing left to do.

- Physical and Sexual Abuse: Physical abuse is a form of violence that people use when faced with people who are less powerful than themselves. Sexual harassment is the unethical behaviour of people ranging from saying abusive words sexual rape.

5. CONCLUSION

No matter how well a person is educated and trained, he / she tends to make mistakes at any time due to factors such as lack of proper rules, lack of supervision and use of inappropriate systems in his / her environment. These mistakes can often be done by violating ethical rules for feelings that are selfish and negative.

The concept of ethics is the meaning of an act and behaviour built on the rules of morality, which has existed since the beginning of human beings. Ethics is a concept that determines the limits of one's freedom according to the freedom of others. Therefore, it is not an arbitrary will by chance.

Ethics is an important concept in the tourism sector where human relations are most intense. As a result of unethical behaviour, it may cause permanent damage to the enterprises in the long term. In tourism businesses, instead of a classical approach for profit only, there should be an understanding that emphasizes customer satisfaction and public relations and gives importance to ethical rules in accordance with world standards and provides personnel training.

There are also important duties for managers in the service sector. In order to maximize customer satisfaction, the motivation of the employees who are in contact with the customer at any time must be well provided. In this regard, managers should behave fairly among the employees, give wages and promotions according to the work performed, and organize the organization structuring in order to ensure good job satisfaction. Another issue for the executives is to keep the promises for customer satisfaction, to ensure that the rules of ethics are applied in the best way in terms of security and other issues within the facility.

Ethical rules are also assigned to customers. Starting from the advertisements made by the service sector, the customers must make feedback in order to inform the relevant units about unethical behaviours such as the quality of the service received, the attitudes of the managers and employees. Today, the use of social media is very suitable for providing a rapid information flow to society in such returns.

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