

New Learning Theory and its Resultant Impact on Achieving Economic Objectives: An Experimental Organisation Development (OD) Approach with respect to Local Tourist Guides at Thenmala and Periyar Tiger Reserve

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Abstract

There are different approaches to OD. But all models of OD is concerned with behaviour modification of employees and hence to improve their efficiency and that of the organisation. Here the researcher has developed Variable Analysis Model of OD. The concept is very simple if any problem of the employee in his internal or external environment (Independent Variable) gets sorted out; it would result in behaviour modification (Dependent Variable) of the employee. Here when the tourist service quality problems got sorted out through REL, it resulted in behaviour modification of the local tourist guides. Behaviour modification led to lower level of tourist complaints and greater economic benefits for the local tourist guides. When REL was applied, tourist complaints came down to below one percent in Thenmala and PTR. In both the destinations, there is a significant improvement in local tourist guides' economic benefits after the introduction of REL. Less complaints from the part of tourists, obviously show greater customer satisfaction. When the customer satisfaction levels of tourists improved considerably, it resulted in generous tip from their part. It has been empirically proved that behaviour modification of local tourist guides' is negatively correlated with problems in their working environment. Hence the research hypothesis stands.

Key Words: OD, Variable Analysis Model, Welfare Economics, Dependent Variable, Independent Variable

1. Location Map

Periyar Tiger Reserve and Thenmala have been selected for this study as they have been developed to the full potential according to the information and statistics available from Eco-tourism Directorate Kerala.

1.1 Thenmala

Located about 72kms from Thiruvananthapuram, the State Capital of Kerala, God's Own Country, and the southern most State of India. Thenmala is a small village at the foothills of Western Ghats and predominantly a forest area. The famous Shendurune Wildlife Sanctuary is the most important eco-tourism resource of Thenmala Eco-tourism. This Wildlife Sanctuary is of about 100 sq. km. and harbours large varieties of flora and fauna.

Thenmala: "Then + Mala", i.e. in local parlance "Then" means honey and "Mala" means hillock i.e. it mean honey hills. The honey collected from Thenmala forest region is of good quality and of high medicinal value because of the unique floristic composition of the forests. Tourism Department, Government of Kerala, India has taken steps to give focused attention to eco-tourism in the State. A separate eco-tourism wing has been created to give policy support for the development of the eco-tourism destinations in the State. Accordingly a project for the first planned eco-tourism destination (Thenmala Eco-tourism Project) has been formulated in and around **Shenduruney Wildlife Sanctuary** with the co-operation of departments such as Forest, Irrigation and Tourism. In order to give flexibility in management for the development of this destination, a separate Society, the Thenmala Eco-tourism Promotion Society (TEPS) has been constituted. (Thenmala Eco-tourism Promotion Society 2007).

"Thenmala Eco-tourism" has been conceived as a first planned eco-tourism destination in India and the initial stages of implementation is completed.

The major objectives of this project are

1. To develop Thenmala dam and its surroundings as a major tourist destination
2. To promote Eco-tourism on the basis of sound principles of ecological sustainability in the surrounding areas of Thenmala
3. *To have a well planned tourism destination with emphasis on sustainable tourism development so as to become a model for other destinations.*

1.2 Periyar Tiger Reserve

Located about 172kms from Thiruvananthapuram towards East direction, the State Capital of Kerala, and God's Own Country that is the southern most State of India. Periyar Tiger Reserve is a Wild Life Sanctuary at the foothills of Western Ghats and predominantly a forest area. According to the World Bank sponsored Eco Development Committee (EDC), tribal people act as tourist guides in connection with various eco-tourism activities (Periyar Tiger Reserve 2007).

1.3 Administration

The *Field Director* is the Chief Executive Officer of the Tiger Reserve. The park is divided into two functional divisions, each managed by a *Deputy Director*. Periyar East is the larger division with an area of 608 sq. km. and headquartered at Thekkady, where most of the tourism activities are centered.

This Division is divided into three Ranges, *Thekkady*, *Periyar* and *Vallakkadavu*.

Periyar West division of 169 sq. Km area, has its headquarters at Peermedu; has two Ranges *Azhutha* and *Pamba*.

Each Range under a *Range Officer* is further divided into Sections and Beats, looked after by *Foresters* and *Forest Guards* respectively.

1.4 Community based eco-tourism

People oriented and park centred community based eco-tourism is the hallmark of Periyar Tiger Reserve. These programmes are conducted by local people responsible for the surveillance of the

vulnerable parts of the reserve. By taking tourists along, they are involved in the conservation of the forests of Periyar and some valuable revenue is generated for community welfare.

People who once made a living by illegal operations in the forests have since become forest protectors and earn their livelihood through these programmes. Hence, as a visitor, when any one joins them in any of these programmes, one is directly contributing towards forest conservation and community welfare.

1.5 Rationality In Selecting Local Tourist Guides as The Focus Group of OD Experiment

There are three elements in eco-tourism

1. It has to be nature-based
2. Conservation and preservation should be the agenda
3. Local people should be the beneficiaries

In the said destinations local people act as tourist guides. OD is a people centric and people supported efficiency enhancement tool. Hence the focus group (local people) have been selected for the OD test process.

1.6 Need for Forestry Research Based on Eco-Tourism

Considering the increasing recognition of the importance of forests for environmental health, energy and employment, scientific forestry research becomes very important necessitating adequate strengthening of the research base as well as priority formulation. The priority areas may include:

- (i) Effective conservation and management of existing forest resources.
- (ii) Research related to wild life and management of national parks and sanctuaries.
- (iii) Research related to skill development of local people who are involved in forest based tourism (eco-tourism) activities.

Eco-tourism is a relatively new concept. People who are concerned with tourism industry have to be rigorously trained in order to understand the new concepts, applications, methodologies etc. Eco-tourism intermediaries like forest officials, local guides and ministerial staff of eco-tourism projects come under this purview. Organisation Development principles are the most effective tools to implement training methodologies in eco- tourism.

Organization Development is an integrated approach to developing individuals, managers, teams and processes to improve organisational performance.

Organisation Development is a first step towards creating a learning organisation and will bring benefits including:-

- Improved productivity and enhanced quality
- Greater staff motivation
- Better morale leading to reduced absenteeism and staff turnover
- Flexibility and response to change

1.7 Generic Model of OD Adopted by The Researcher: Management By Objectives Model

Besides the behavioural interventions, Management by Objectives has also been used as an approach to organisation development. MBO came to India in the late sixties, initially through the multinational companies. Several major Indian subsidiaries of the multinational companies, especially those based in Britain, were advised by their parent companies to implement MBO. The environmental pressures in India, largely due to government regulation at eco-tourism destinations, diverted management attention away from the efforts designed to increase organisational effectiveness through managerial interventions. Thus, eco-tourism failed to become an important source of knowledge for the development of MBO practice in India.

MBO process had a natural inclination towards emphasis on planning and controlling aspects of MBO than on contribution, motivation and development of managers. MBO has been perceived essentially as an instrument of planning and control, partly because these are usually not well developed and practised in eco-tourism destinations and also because of the need to anticipate and cope with a turbulent business environment in the wake of economic meltdown.

Initially it has been observed that in tourist destinations, employees are concerned about the implications of linkage between performance and rewards. The prevailing system with emphasis on seniority for promotions and absence of differential rewards to recognise merit seems to be the major source of this concern. As a result MBO has not been linked directly to decisions on rewards and the researcher has opted for an indirect linkage only. **The researcher has adopted objective based OD approach. The following objectives have been given top priority by the researcher.**

- 1. Improving the economic status of local tourist guides through the application of OD**
- 2. Improving the social status of local tourist guides through the application of OD**
- 3. Improving efficiency levels of local tourist guides through the application of OD**

1.8 Variable Analysis Model of OD: The Customised Model Developed by The Researcher To Achieve The MBO Model

The crux of this model suggests that when any related problem of the employee gets sorted out, it results in behaviour modification of employees and ultimately it leads to organizational improvement.

Organizational Improvement Practice is made more specific through IDRIA Design, where I stands for independent variable, D stands for dependent variable and RIA stands for remedial interventions applied. The researcher has coined variable as an empirical property that takes two or more values. In other words, if a property can change in value or kind it can be regarded as a variable.

1.9 Dependent and Independent Variables

In most of the cases researcher focused on cause-effect relationships and started with an effect, then search for its causes. The variable which represents the cause is termed as independent variable. The variable that is the effect or is the result or outcome of another variable is the dependent variable. Here the researcher has termed independent variable and dependent variable as predictor and criterion variables.

1.10 Retrospective Experiential Learning (REL)

REL is a relatively permanent change in behaviour that occurs as a result of reproducing one's best previous experiences. Here the experiment has been done at Thenmala and PTR regarding Customer Relations Management. Guides have been asked to recollect their experiences about the following. Left a tourist in a good frame of mind or explained something to the tourist in a way that he or she understood and the guide learned something unexpectedly. The chances are that the guides are aware of some of the elements of their strategies but equally the chances are that there are some crucial bits of which the guides have no conscious knowledge. Guides have been asked to recollect their words and style of communication such as gestures, postures, composure, disposition, overall body language and eye contact and ultimately approach at that point of time. They have been asked to document it and go through it. The idea was to make it standardised rather than happening it erratically. Objective of this experiment was to help one live within one's potential rather than imposing a strategy from outside. RETROSPECTIVE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING (REL) is a learning instrument developed by the researcher.

1.10.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE EXPERIMENT

1. To understand the relationship between REL and tourist complaints.
2. To understand the relationship between REL and economic benefits of local tourist guides.
3. To understand the viability of Variable Analysis Model of OD.

1.10.2 HYPOTHESES OF THE EXPERIMENT

1. There is no relationship between REL and tourist complaints.
2. There is no relationship between REL and economic benefits of local tourist guides.

3. Dependent Variable (Behaviour Modification of Local Tourist Guides) is negatively correlated with Independent Variable (Problems in the Local Tourist Guides', environment)

It has been found that both in PTR and in Thenmala after the application of Retrospective Experiential Learning, percentages of customer complaints have come down below one percent. It shows that REL can produce results.

The chart shows that tourists' level of satisfaction increased and this in turn had resulted in better earnings for the guides. Hence the research hypothesis does not stand.

There are different approaches to OD. But all models of OD is concerned with behaviour modification of employees and hence to improve their efficiency and that of the organisation. Here the researcher has developed **Variable Analysis Model of OD**. The concept is very simple if any problem of the employee in his internal or external environment (Independent Variable) gets sorted out; it would result in behaviour modification (Dependent Variable) of the employee. Here when the tourist service quality problems got sorted out through REL, it resulted in behaviour modification of the local tourist guides. Behaviour modification led to lower level of tourist complaints and greater economic benefits for the local tourist guides. When REL was applied, tourist complaints came down to below one percent in Thenmala and PTR. In both the destinations, there is a significant improvement in local tourist guides' economic benefits after the introduction of REL. Less complaints from the part of tourists, obviously show greater customer satisfaction. When the customer satisfaction levels of tourists improved considerably, it resulted in generous tip from their part. It has been empirically proved that behaviour modification of local tourist guides' is negatively correlated with problems in their working environment.

1.10.3 HOW REL WAS PRACTISED

As Retrospective Experiential Learning is used for behaviour modification, it has been termed as REB Mod (Retrospective Experiential Behaviour Modification). The typical REB Mod. programme follows a six step problem solving model.

REB Mod.

Step

1. Recollect an incident in which one tourist has been left with complete satisfaction and the guide learned something accidentally.
2. Recollect the behavioural cues on that occasion, including gestures, postures, eye contacts and overall body language and wordings.
3. Document the said behavioural cues and wordings.
4. Take the pledge that it does not get revealed to other guides in order to avoid duplication and hence to maintain uniqueness.
5. Make enough rehearsals to get it into the groove
6. Practice it in day to day guiding.

Each and every guide was directed to make an honest retrospection into one's guiding interaction after a week's activities. This is very important because they are the interaction frontline personnel. The guides have to take out one incident of guiding that stands out from the rest and has to recollect the entire incident from the beginning to the end.

Step 2

The guides have to individually document the behavioural cues and wording without disclosing the same to their peers.

Step 3

They are directed to take the pledge regarding the maintenance of confidentiality about what they had learned accidentally.

Step 4

Guides are directed to perform atleast five rehearsals about what they have learnt unexpectedly so that they can reproduce the behavioural cues and wordings as and when the situation demands. Ultimately they are directed to document what they have learnt through observation, experiments, impromptu, feedback and through encountering real world problems.

Step 5

Guides are directed to go through it before embarking their routine guiding and to practice it in their day to day guiding.

As the principles of uniqueness and non-duplication are relevant here, theories of knowledge management and knowledge sharing do not inspire confidence. In simple words REL is all about exploring one's unknown potential and hidden talents and hence to reinforce the same and make it routine so that it results in behaviour modification.

11. Conclusion

The tests show that REL process has significantly improved the social status of local guides. **Social status scale by Stuart Chapin (Minnesota University Press, 1933) has been used.** It is quite evident from the study that REL has improved the economic status of the tourist guides. The positive correlation between REL and the social status of local tourist guides is also established here. The learning impact can create terrific results in terms of economic status as well as social status of tribal tourist guides who strive to make a living. Ultimately management theory can alter the lives of worlds' poorest of the poor population in terms of economic status and social status that leads to alleviation of poverty. Social and cultural welfare of the poor people is the hard nut to crack in developing countries. This study shows that learning theory helped in improving the efficiency and an effective contribution in welfare economics.

References

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Table 1 Location (Periyar Tiger Reserve)

Area	777 sq. km.
Location	Longitude:76° 55'- 77° 26' E, Latititude:9° 16' – 9° 40' N
Boundaries	
North	Peermedu taluk
South	Pathanamthitta district
East	Theni, Tirunelveli & Ramnad districts of Tamil Nadu
West	Kottayam district

Table-2 IDRIA Design

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Remedial Interventions Applied
<i>Need for Task force</i>	<i>Structural Problems</i>	<i>Human Resource Committee (HRC) formed</i>
<i>Need for economic viability</i>	<i>Procedural Problems</i>	<i>HRC Suggested for diversification and new products, Development and absorption of the new technology, Marketing strategy at unit level and strengthening the existing products and technology</i>
<i>Need for protecting tribal arts</i>	<i>Cultural Problems</i>	<i>HRC decided to protect ethnic arts</i>
<i>Need for Behavioural Science Interventions based on personality types</i>	<i>Behavioural Problems</i>	<i>Implemented ten different interventions for local guides.</i>
<i>Need for protection against forest fire and against environmental damages</i>	<i>Environmental Problems</i>	<i>Recommendation for Environmental Auditing by HRCs and GIS enabled forest fire management.</i>
<i>Need for Workshops and desirable Motivational Performance Scores (MPS)</i>	<i>Motivational Problems</i>	<i>HRC suggested OD effort at various divisions need to be intensified and OD awareness must be percolated down to the lower managerial levels, Grid Training and Development for HRC at PTR and Thenmala Skill Building Exercise for HRC at PTR and Thenmala and it was decided to conduct a fresh feedback survey at organisational level to assess the change and also the future directions</i>
<i>Need for Quality Improvement</i>	<i>Service Quality Problems</i>	HRC decided to experiment with TQM and Quality Circles at local tourist guide's level after the exploratory study at HRC level. The researcher developed new learning theory- <u>Retrospective Experiential Learning (REL)</u>

Table 3 Results of Retrospective Experiential Learning at Thenmala

Before REL		After REL	
Oct-Dec 08	1.7		
Jan-Mar 09	1.8		
Apr-June 09	1.6		
Jul-Sept09		0.3	

Table 4 Results of Retrospective Experiential Learning at PTR

Before REL		After REL	
Oct-Dec 08	1.7		
Jan-Mar 09	1.8		
Apr-June 09	1.6		
Jul-Sept09		0.3	

Table 5 Customer satisfaction-based Incentive Earnings Increased for Guides

Period	Average Incentive Earnings(Rs) at PTR
Oct 07-Nov 07	43
Dec 07-Jan 08	55
Feb 08-Mar 08	65
Apr 08-May 08	70
Jun 08-Jul 08	75
Aug 08- Sep 08	102

Table 6 Customer satisfaction-based Incentive Earnings Increased for Guides

Period	Average Incentive Earnings(Rs) at Thenmala
Oct 07-Nov 07	55
Dec 07-Jan 08	60
Feb 08-Mar 08	60
Apr 08-May 08	70
Jun 08-Jul 08	70
Aug 08- Sep 08	100

Table 7. Test for social status of tourist guides' before and after REL process at PTR and Thenmala

Weights on Social Status at PTR Before REL Process				
42	36	40	42	36
40	38	38	40	40
38	40	36	38	42
40	36	38	38	40
Weights on Social Status at PTR After REL Process				
58	56	58	56	58
56	58	56	56	58
60	58	58	56	58
56	60	60	58	56

Table 8 Paired Samples Statistics at PTR

		Paired Samples Statistics			
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Social Status at PTR before OD process	38.9000	20	1.99737	.44662
	Social Status at PTR after OD process	57.5000	20	1.43270	.32036

Table 9 Paired Samples Test at PTR

		Paired Differences			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
Pair 1	Social Status at PTR before OD process	18.60000	2.76063	.61729	-30.131	19	.000
	Social Status at PTR after OD process						

Table 10 Weights on Social Status at Thenmala before REL Process

Weights on Social Status at Thenmala before REL Process				
36	42	36	36	42
38	42	42	42	36
40	40	38	38	36
42	40	40	40	40
38	36	38	40	38
38	36	36	38	36

Weights on Social Status at Thenmala After REL Process				
46	52	48	44	52
48	52	54	50	46
50	50	60	46	46
52	50	50	48	48
48	46	48	48	48
48	46	48	46	42

Table 11 Paired Samples Statistics on Social Status at Thenmala

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Social Status at Thenmala before OD process	38.6667	30	2.24888	.41059
	Social Status at Thenmala after OD process	48.6667	30	3.37673	.61650

Table 12 Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Social Status at Thenmala before OD process - Social Status at Thenmala after OD process	10.00000	2.62613	.47946	-20.857	29	.000

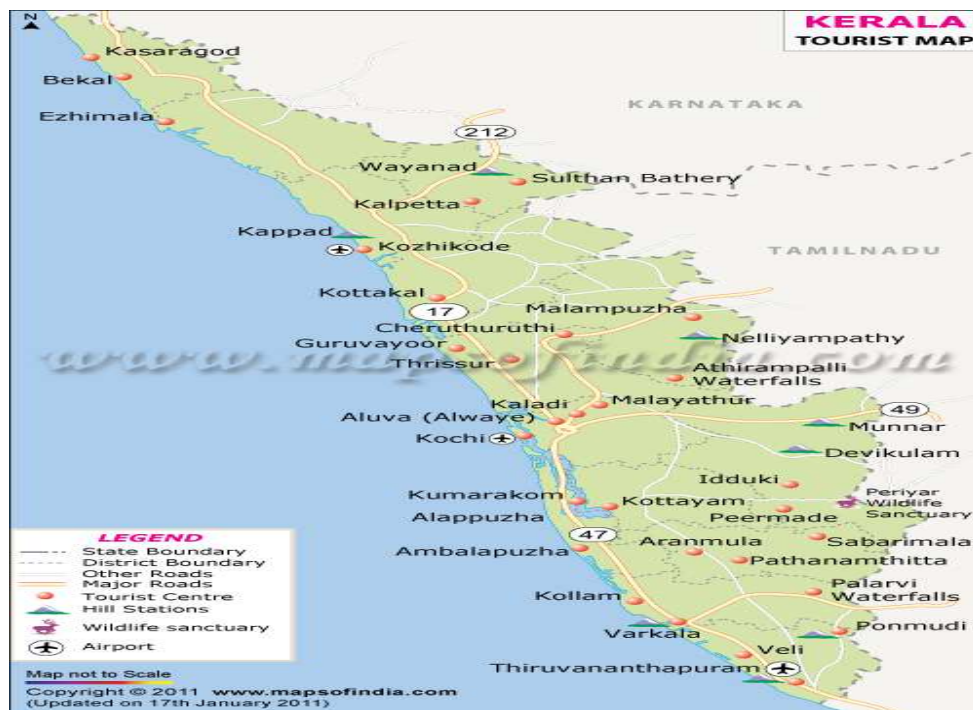


Figure 1 Tourist Map of Kerala

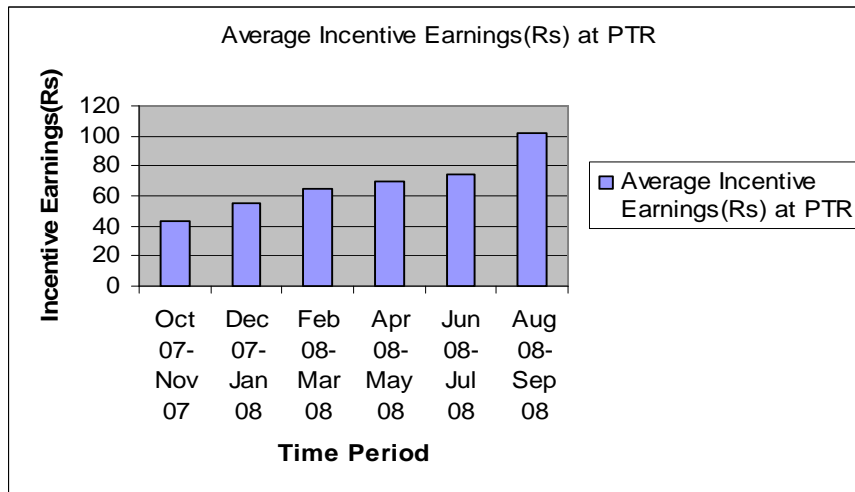


Figure 2. Average Earnings at PTR

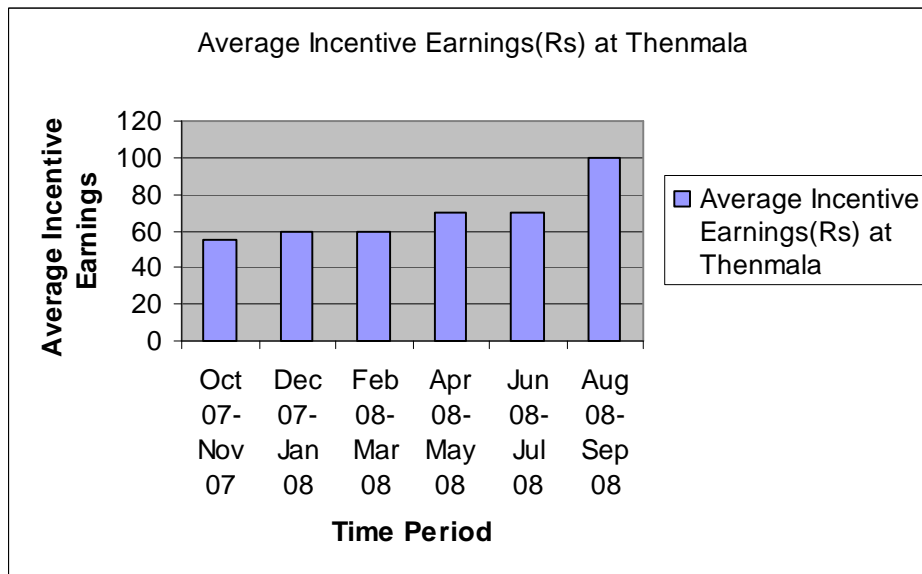


Figure 3 Average Earnings at Thenmala

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