

From Hospitality Administrators to Leaders of Global Tourism Management: Restructuring the Orange Valley State Tourism Department

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Awards, honours and recognition were pouring in for the Orange Valley State Tourism Department from prestigious national and international governments and agencies at the turn of the new millennium. The Department was also perceived as being far ahead of similar state level entities in the country. Dr. Vivek, the Department's Director, a medical professional turned public administrator, was however thoughtful. He foresaw great challenges (read opportunities) ahead, with tourism emerging as one of the fastest growing industries in the world, facilitated by affordable air travel, increasing reach of mass visual media, spread of internet, and above all the growing tendency of people worldwide to break free from the socio-psychological barriers associated with geographical boundaries of nations-states-counties to explore the 'global village.'

But he genuinely doubted if the Tourism Department of Orange Valley, a state bestowed with immense natural beauty of both the seas and the mountains and with rich cultural heritage, was really capable and equipped to capitalize on these favourable changes, with its current structural form and innate processes. A rigorous review of the Department's structure and processes appeared inevitable and of high urgency to Dr. Vivek. Perhaps 'even a total restructuring could be necessary,' he said to himself. A chance meeting soon with Prof. Wisemann, the Director of the leading national management school situated in the state led to a proposal for initiating the study.

Consultants' Proposal

The proposal submitted by the consultants was strongly rooted in the belief that Orange Valley Tourism Department should develop itself into a service, developmental and enabling (facilitating and capability building) organization, with sound professional expertise, and core competency in tourism development, management and sustenance, rather than remaining as an bureaucratic-administrative, regulatory and maintenance organization alone. Further, it was also felt that the department needs to take on itself the responsibility to convert the tourism industry into a highly professional and service oriented one.

The proposal noted that there was good appreciation, in many quarters, of the innovative and developmental initiatives and activities undertaken by the Department. However, it also expressed the view that, as a progressive organization, it was necessary for the Department to take stock of its goals, structure, processes, and systems to assess if they were all coherently and congruently set to take on the future challenges and opportunities.

The proposal set the following Objectives: To study the current structure, functioning and competencies of the Department, and to assess if they are sufficient as well as adequately oriented to meet the evolving trends in tourism in the state as well as in the national and global scenario, and to suggest changes, modifications, and may be even significant re-structuring of the Department, if found necessary.

Data Collection

Data Collection was done through a series of semi structured interviews with Top Management of the Department, and a cross section of members from various levels, functions and locations. Interviews were also conducted with a few tourists (Indian and foreign), and a few persons who directly and regularly interacted with the Department (Tour/Travel Operators and Hotel Owners, etc.). Secondary data was taken from archives and files available in, and shared by the Department; Pamphlets/Notes, Annual Administrative Reports, Manuals, Brochures, etc., published by the Department; Relevant Reports of the Government, State Legislature, etc.; Internet resources from relevant sites of Governments, Tourism Departments/Boards, Industry Associations, etc.; and Library Resources: Reports, Working Papers, Books, etc., on Tourism and Tourism Management. In the above process, Comparative Data on the structuring and functioning of some of the reputed tourism departments/boards in other countries were also obtained. In the next section, I briefly give the origin and evolution of the Department, also as an illustration of the nature of this case.

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Origin & Evolution

Origins of the Orange Valley State Tourism Department can be traced to the State Guest Department instituted by the Maharaja of one of the princely states in 1930, and the Hospitality Organization of the adjoining princely state. The main (and only) function of these units was hospitality – to take care of the guests of the king (then) and of the State (later; with the re-organization of Indian States in 1956) – all aspects related to VVIP/VIP boarding, lodging and travel. For this purpose, a few palaces of the Maharaja and guesthouses of the State and a small fleet of cars and boats were maintained by these organizations, which constituted their Estate function and the Garage. The State Guest Department was staffed with persons well connected with the Maharaja and who were capable of handling these functions very efficiently.

The State Guest Department and the Hospitality Organization continued as such till the re-organization of Indian States. Following the formation of the new State on November 01, 1956, they were combined to form the Tourist Department in 1958. Signs of change began to appear in the 1980s, with the appointment of an Indian Administrative Service Officer as Director of Tourism in 1980, the first time an Officer of the IAS coming to this position, and in 1981 the Tourist Department was renamed as the Department of Tourism. However, these changes had no consequence on the main (and only) function of the Department, namely, hospitality (estate and garage), and it continues even to this day in a significant manner.

Real signs of metamorphosis began to show up in the mid-80s. Consultants observed good consensus among members in the Department familiar with its history and evolution, that, the Department began to show fundamental changes in its orientation and activity profile around 1985, during the directorship of Mr. T Bleu Krish, IAS, the current Secretary of Tourism. Tourism planning, promotion and development began to find space in the agenda of the Department alongside hospitality and estate functions. For the first time tourism project proposals were submitted to the Central Government for financial assistance, making Orange Valley the first State in India to apply for Central Government funds for Tourism Development.

By 1989, focus on Tourism Development activities throughout the State emerged reasonably important in the agenda of the Department. The Department began to feel the need for its presence at the District level as well, and this was brought about in the form of District Tourism Promotion Councils (DTPCs) in 1988.

Towards the onset of the new millennium, Orange Valley began to attract world wide tourist attention, contributed significantly by the spread of Internet and Television channels. Various Travel and Tourism Publications and in-flight magazines, among others, have been giving high ratings and special recommendations, and offering attractive packages to visit Orange Valley. For instance, the National Geographic Traveler recommended Orange Valley, as one of the 50 must see destinations in a lifetime, listing it under the Paradise Found category.

Taking a significant professional step, the Department published the Tourism Vision 2025, presenting a SWOT analysis of the tourism scenario in Orange Valley, outlining a set of ambitious objectives, and detailing the strategy direction and action plans [short-medium-long term] to achieve them.

Stress due to the increased tourist attention and tourism management activities began to show on the Department. Realization also set in the minds of members active in the Department and its top officers, that, a robust organization holds the key to strategic success; that tourism was a professional domain, and that it needed to be handled professionally.

They recognized that although they have been engaged in Tourism Planning, Development, Promotion and Marketing for the last 15-18 years, the Department really needed to be carefully nurtured and built up, bringing in specific new competencies and orientations. A positive urge began to be felt in the Department to emerge truly professional.

The Case in Brief

The case, following the description of the origin, history, evolution and growth of the Orange Valley Tourism Department (as briefly given above), goes on to detail the existing structure of the Department, significant positions and roles in it, and the various processes followed and systems prevailing. Recognizing that the existing structure, people orientations, roles and processes followed were purely administrative-bureaucratic, and heavily dictated by the forces of historical origin and evolution of the Department, the case presents opportunity for an analysis of its relevance and suitability in the context of a fast changing environment. Developing and proposing an appropriate set of structures, systems, processes, positions and/or roles for the Orange Valley Tourism Department is the expected conclusion or outcome for this case.