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School and Hotel Integration: Practices and experiences from stakeholders



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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an exploratory study of stakeholder feedback on a Hotel Integration project from the perspective of students, HR personnel working in a teaching hotel, and subject teachers. Hotel Integration was one of the principal components in the delivery of a program entitled “Human Resources Management (HRM) in the Tourism and Hotel Industry.” The design and implementation focused on promoting student-centered learning. Data were collected from students, teachers and HR staff, and qualitative analysis undertaken to identify similarities and differences in their views. The paper presents dendrograms representing these views and discusses participants’ experiences of the project. In the analysis, feedback was classified into four categories; Planning, Implementation and Management of the Project, Project Evaluation; and Consideration and Improvement of Future Learning Activities. The results generally showed that the confidentiality of hotel data and large class sizes were the major issues affecting the design and implementation of the integration project. The paper closes by suggesting recommendations and considerations for future projects. For example, the student-centered learning approach could be further explained and promoted to students in order to enhance its popularity and general acceptance.

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1. Introduction

Running Hotel Integration project involves many different parties, and requires considerable planning and organizing throughout. This presents challenges for teachers. This study therefore collects and explores feedback on The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) Hotel Integration project of the subject “Human Resources Management (HRM) in the Tourism and Hotel Industry” from the perspectives of different stakeholders, including students, human resources (HR) personnel of teaching hotel, and subject teachers from PolyU School of Hotel and Tourism Management (SHTM). Since HR issues are company internal management matters, therefore stakeholders like guests are not engaged in this study. The experiences of stakeholders arranging the Hotel Integration project, and their recommendations for future projects, are shared and discussed.

This paper studied the stakeholders’ opinions on Hotel Integration project in the academic year 2010–11, there were 200-student and 207-student studied in that semester I and semester II respectively. Some literatures regarding Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Experiential Learning (EL), and Captives/Teaching Hotels were reviewed to highlight the effectiveness and importance of adopting Hotel Integration project in understanding management subjects like HRM. Students, hotel HR

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personnel, and teachers were interviewed to give comments on different aspects which include Planning, Implementation and Management of the Project, Project Evaluation, and Consideration and Improvement of Future Learning Activities. Opinions of different stakeholders were presented and summarized in Results and Discussion section illustrated by dendrograms. Conclusion and recommendations from authors, and limitations were presented in final part.

1.1. Background of study

PolyU SHTM organizes both Bachelor of Science (BSc) program (Hotel and Tourism Management) and Bachelor of Science conversion program (BScC) (Hotel Management, Tourism Management, and Convention and Event Management). These conversion programs are one-and-a-half or two-year self-financed top-up degrees designed for students who finished higher diploma or associate degree programmes in related disciplines that aim to upgrade their qualification to bachelor degree. All final year degree students are required to take some compulsory subjects, "HRM in the Tourism and Hotel Industry" is one of the subjects that students must study before graduation. This subject aims to let students understanding and exploring strategic HRM practices in the tourism and hotel industry. There are four assessment components in the HRM subject which include pre-class and class activities, mid-term test, Hotel Integration project, and final examination.

Pavesic (1993) highlights that students learn by assimilating theories then applying principles and concepts to real-life situations. Accordingly, Hotel Integration project was designed to form one of the principal components of the subject "HRM in the Tourism and Hotel Industry" offered in academic year 2010–11. The intention was for students to learn from the presentation of theory in a real-life setting (Ololube, 2011) and thus integrate their classroom knowledge.

1.2. Teaching and research hotel—Hotel ICON

In April 2011, Hotel ICON opened. It is a teaching and research hotel attached to the PolyU, the 28-storey complex is comprised of three key components: (1) Hotel ICON, (2) SHTM Campus, and (3) University House. It is a state-of-the-art learning environment that includes conference facilities, teaching restaurants, classrooms, a library, and several technology laboratories; it marked a milestone for the institution. Hotel ICON now provides students of the PolyU SHTM with an opportunity to gain experience of real-life practice, and is an environment within which their interest in learning can be fostered.

Since the opening of the PolyU Hotel ICON, there are many school–Hotel Integration activities including Professor for a Day (seminars provided by industrial professionals), site visit, student projects, research activities, Work Integrated Education (industrial placement), and cross faculty integration activities, etc. From September to December 2012, a total of 62 school-integration activities were organized. HRM Hotel Integration project is one of the activities that require students to handle different HR issues as liaised with the hotel HR personnel.

1.3. Background of HRM Hotel Integration project

The Hotel Integration project is a continuous assessment that sets out to examine students' critical and analytical skills in applying HRM concepts and theories to address particular HR issues arising at the pre-opening stage of a new hotel. Students were divided into groups of 8–10, each of which was assigned the role of HR Consultant to Hotel ICON and tasked with preparing development plans for the different HR functions. For instance, some groups were responsible to conduct job analysis or suggesting appropriate selection tests in the aspects of recruitment and selection; in the training and orientation HR function, some groups were asked to design orientation workshops or develop different training programs to different hotel employees. Moreover, some groups were responsible to prepare compensation and benefits plans like establishing different remuneration packages to different level of staff, or they also had the chance to draft policies and procedures in areas like grievances, leave management, disciplinary actions, and performance appraisal; and so on were randomly assigned to each group. To complete the project, students were required to acquire a basic knowledge of the topic by reading relevant journal articles and books; they were also coached throughout by subject teachers. In addition, the HR Director and managers of Hotel ICON acted as advisers, offering HR updates and sharing new industry practice and standards with students in consultation meetings. Towards the end of each semester, students were required to submit written reports and give oral presentations to report their findings and recommendations.

Unlike traditional academic projects that require students to undertake secondary data research and collect primary data using qualitative or quantitative methods, Hotel Integration project gives them opportunities to engage with industry personnel to obtain first-hand information and use it to solve real-life problems. Completed projects are normally also passed to the hotel for reference purposes. The teachers involved in this study identified the rationale for the project in terms of three aspects; Transfer of Knowledge, which refers to the application of theory and identifying where it differs from real-life experience; Promoting Student-Centered Independent Learning, in terms of expecting final-year students to be able to collect knowledge through different channels such as interviewing HR personnel in consultation meetings; and Facilitating Teamwork Collaboration, with students given the chance to practice working in a team and experience group dynamics in a workplace environment.

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