



Hospitality management graduates' perceptions of career factor importance and career factor experience



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to examine the perceived importance and perceived experiences of career factors for hospitality management graduates and to examine differences in perceptions of hospitality graduates who left the hospitality industry with those who stayed. In addition, differences in perceptions between hospitality graduates and hiring managers were examined. Compared to those who had left the industry, hospitality graduates working in the hospitality industry indicated 11 factors were more important to them. Examples of these factors included having a career where graduates use their degree and a career with good promotion prospects. Graduates who left the hospitality industry indicated it was more important to have a career where they could contribute to society as compared to graduates that stayed in the industry. Hiring managers perceived their organizations offered more in a career than the graduates expected or deemed important which contradicts the findings from the graduates.

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1. Introduction

Previous researchers have examined hospitality management graduates within the hospitality industry for many reasons. Walsh and Taylor (2007) examined graduates from specific higher education institutions and Richardson (2009) examined current students' perceptions and expectations of careers in hospitality and tourism upon graduation. Blomme et al. (2009) found differences between pre- and post-entry job expectations of hospitality management graduates in the hospitality industry. The current research study focused on the experiences and importance of career factors to hospitality graduates with comparisons to line managers' perceptions. For purposes of this research, career factors were identified as factors present at different levels within different industries that influence decisions on career choice (Kyriacou and Coulthard, 2000). Motivational theory was used when examining the career factors that influence graduates when choosing a particular career.

If hospitality graduates are entering the industry without an accurate understanding of the industry, this could be the cause of many leaving the hospitality industry. With hospitality

management graduates not entering the hospitality industry, and instead working in other areas, it is important to determine where gaps exist so educators and practitioners can address needed changes.

The purpose of this research was to determine the perceived importance and experiences of career factors in the hospitality industry for recent hospitality management graduates. In other words, the researchers examined what recent hospitality management graduates viewed as important factors in a career and whether they experienced these important factors in their hospitality career. Hospitality management graduates still in, and those that left, the hospitality industry were examined. In addition, career factor perceptions of hiring managers in the hospitality industry and then compared this information to the two groups of graduates. Previous research has examined career factors in the hospitality industry and found lack of clarity in student perceptions and expectations (Richardson, 2008). Blomme et al. (2009) found differences in expectations of hospitality students once they enter the industry. The following objectives guided this study:

- (1) examine differences in perceptions of career factor importance and career factor experience of hospitality graduates relative to whether or not they remained in the hospitality industry; and
- (2) explore hiring managers' perceptions of what potential applicants want in a hospitality career (tied to career factor importance of graduates) and what the manager's company has to offer (tied to career factor experiences of graduates).

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1.1. Significance of study

Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000) suggested realistic expectations would lead hospitality graduates to remain in the hospitality industry. Richardson (2009) found expectations of hospitality and tourism graduates to be important when considering which career to choose. In addition to Kusluvan and Kusluvan, researchers (Chuang et al., 2007), researchers have stated the importance of experience in addition to education. This research further supports these claims.

Lu and Adler (2008) found 32% of hospitality graduates intended to leave the hospitality industry, the current study will compare this to hospitality graduates who have been in the industry for up to ten years. Walsh and Taylor (2007) found intellectual challenges to be important in retaining employees. This study contributes to this research by showing a gap between the importance of intellectual challenges and what hospitality graduates are experiencing. If Walsh and Taylor are correct, this should be of concern to hospitality researchers, educators, and industry professionals.

2. Literature review

There are several career factor and choice theories; for purposes of this study, motivational theory was used to assist in understanding why certain career factors were selected. Two types of motivation were examined in relation to career factors: intrinsic and extrinsic. In the Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) intrinsic motivations and extrinsic motivations are contrasted. Intrinsic references, “doing something because it is interesting or enjoyable” (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p. 55) for example, choosing a career because it is enjoyable. In contrast, extrinsic motivation references, “doing something to attain some separable outcome” (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p. 60). An extrinsic motivation for career choice would be choosing a career because it had a good starting salary.

2.1. Career experiences and perceptions

Richardson (2009) mentioned tourism and hospitality students are unclear about careers and working conditions in the hospitality industry and expressed the importance of examining career factors. Wong and Ko (2009) found important factors in determining a career of hotel employees to be: available free time, workplace support, flexible work schedule, allegiance to work, ability to voluntarily reduce hours, and working extra hours leading to rewards. Wong and Ko's (2009) findings show a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors to be important based on Ryan and Deci's (2000) definitions.

Career factors that are important to employees led Blomme et al. (2009) to argue that discrepancies in what employees expect in the hotel industry and what they experience may lead to negative consequences. These are distinct differences in expectations of job content, development opportunities, work-family balance, salary, performance-related pay, and career opportunities (Blomme et al., 2009). For instance, Kim et al. (2009) found a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators to be the most valued factors in the hospitality and tourism industry: interesting work, having benefits, and good working conditions. The least valued factors included location, training, and supervisor. The authors noted as graduates advanced professionally, salary, an extrinsic motivator, became the most valued factor.

Taking into account the diversity of hospitality students, Richardson (2010) found that international students were more likely to pursue a hospitality career because more of their career factors would be met. The author argued if international students

had a more positive image of the industry then perhaps they should be targeted by hospitality companies as the hospitality industry may be more likely to meet the international students' career factor preferences.

Considering age diversity, there has been a variety of research assessing career expectations, desires, and perceptions of Gen Y employees. Interestingly, in their study of hospitality management students who were in generation Y, Choi and Kwon (2013) found that attitudes about workplace fun had an effect on hospitality job attitudes and behaviors. The researchers suggested that hospitality managers recognize that Gen Y employees are interested in having fun at work. Thus, it is reasonable to consider structuring work in a way that is fun to attract this new generation to hospitality jobs. Aside from a fun workplace, Maxwell et al. (2010) found that hospitality and tourism undergraduate students in Scotland valued career factors including promotion, good pay and job security.

Although this review has focused primarily on hospitality management students, it should be noted that the literature outside the hospitality field has illustrated similar findings, that a variety of factors influence career decisions. For example, research by Xu (2013) found all college graduates consider pay, job status, and satisfaction with promotion opportunities as dominate career choice factors. In addition, Xu found individuals who have an occupation closely related to their major had higher job satisfaction. Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000) found pay to be less of a factor, but enjoyable career to be the most important motivator.

2.2. Education importance

Ayres (2006) found 4 of 10 tourism managers interviewed believed education had no influence on their career path. Four managers in the study expressed the importance of education for their current and future positions and the remaining two managers were unsure. Marchante et al. (2007) further examined the connection between education and careers in the hospitality industry. The authors defined the term educational mismatch as individuals with too much education or insufficient education for their current positions. The authors found over half of the respondents to be educationally mismatched. Individuals without adequate education for their current position compensated for the lack of education with more experience.

There are not a set core of courses at the variety of institutions individuals can earn a hospitality degree. Therefore, there will be a variety of different course materials, skills, and competencies learned by graduates. Müller et al., 2009 indicated that hospitality graduates do not have sufficient problem solving skills, computer skills, and oral communication skills. Nevertheless, Lee (2007) recognized hospitality and tourism students who participated in industry based learning had a better understanding of how organizations operate, a more realistic understanding of career expectations, a larger network of industry contacts, an increased initiative and ability to adapt to change, and increased leadership and financial skills.

2.3. Careers and education

Roney and Öztin (2007) found students without work experience had neither a favorable nor an unfavorable perception of tourism careers. However, when students completed work experiences in college, their perceptions of the tourism industry were affected in a negative way due to irregular working hours, lacking job security (Roney and Öztin, 2007), low pay, and lack of development opportunities (Lu and Adler, 2008). Richardson (2008) found 46% of hospitality and tourism students with work experience claimed they would not work in the hospitality industry after they graduated because of their work experiences in the industry. Of the

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