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Curriculum planning of MICE course in continuing education

Pi-feng Hsieh*

Department of Marketing Management, Takming University of Science and Technology, Taipei, Taiwan, ROC



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ABSTRACT

The rapid development on the MICE industry has created an increased demand for labor. This study explores the curriculum frameworks of the MICE course for continuing education, rather than the baccalaureate program, to educate the prospective workforce to be immediately available for the industry. The fuzzy Delphi technique, analytic hierarchical process, and sensitivity analysis are applied to analyze the curriculum framework. Additionally, two objectives are proposed to the needs of the MICE profession: the planning-focused and the operation-focused programs. The proposed curriculum frameworks provide systematic planning for MICE programs and offer a solution to the labor shortage in the industry.

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1. Introduction

The MICE (meeting, incentive travel, convention and exhibition, event) industry is one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry because it brings multiple economic benefits to the host region (Getz, 2008; Whitford, 2009) resulting from the longer stay of the attendees than other types of tourists (Zhang, Leung, & Qu, 2007) and the benefits it creates to the MICE related industrial network (Oppermann & Chon, 1997). Rapid development and global attention on the MICE industry has created increased demand for talent within this field. This study thus explores the curriculum frameworks of the MICE course for continuing education rather than the baccalaureate program to educate and train the prospective workforce to be immediately available for the industry.

The MICE discipline has been unappreciated due to being viewed as an undeveloped and irregular profession and a subset of the tourism and hospitality industry (Sperstad & Cecil, 2011). However, with its recent growth, many countries like Japan (DeFranco, Abbott, & Ali, 2005), U.S. (Cecil, Reed, & Reed, 2011), Canada (Sperstad & Cecil, 2011), China (Xuehui & Jie, 2011), Korea (Lee, Lee, & Kim, 2009), and South Africa (Fenich, Hermann, & Hashimoto, 2012) are currently devoted to constructing MICE degree programs. Nevertheless, to cope with the workforce shortage due to the rapid growth of the industry, programs will engage more purposively in MICE or event related industries, rather than simply relying on in-house industry training. That is, to bridge the gap between higher education and the marketplace, tuition must directly serve the needs of the industry as well as its present and future employees (Ross, 1992). This research thus proposes establishing a curriculum framework from the perspective of the industry to provide an immediately available workforce. In addition, the establishment of a curriculum is usually based on a more subjective approach and, in particular, with the connection of the industry's needs, it is difficult to have a consistent assessment of the MICE curriculum criteria. Therefore, both qualitative and quantitative approaches are applied in this research to enhance both interpretation and positive empiricism.

*Tel.: +886 2 26585801x5204; mob.: +886 952 383652.

E-mail address: vivien@takming.edu.tw

The specific research questions of this paper are: what are the criteria of the system of the MICE course? To serve the needs of the MICE industry, what should the prospective workforce learn or how should they be trained?

2. Literature review

The MICE course is not considered an independent discipline (Lee et al., 2009). Since the activities of MICE are included in event tourism (Getz, 2008), programs with MICE-related courses are mostly arranged in the section of Tourism and Hospitality Management (e.g., Fenich & Hashimoto, 2010; Jones, 2010; Phelan & Mills, 2011; Sperstad & Cecil, 2011), and especially, event management (e.g., Jones, 2010; Lee et al., 2009; Xuehui & Jie, 2011). Lee et al. (2009) proposed event management is still a specialty or focus area within hospitality and tourism management, rather than an independent discipline. This is identical to the argument of Lee et al. (2009) that regards the program of event management as evolving from the hospitality and tourism perspectives associated with operating and managing hospitality properties and tourism destinations. The Convention Industry Council (2011) defines events as the general term for an organized occasion, such as a meeting, convention, exhibition, special event, gala dinner, etc. Sperstad and Cecil (2011) developed a framework for meetings, business events, and social events, to bring MICE related activities into a certain category and drive the rate of investment (R.O.I.) and business results. Regarded as an important segment of event management, MICE management courses are mostly designed based on the concept of event management.

Research investigating MICE programs include the perspective of KSAs (knowledge, skills, and abilities) building (Phelan & Mills, 2011), market position (Jones, 2010), and career patterns (Fenich & Hashimoto, 2010). Besides, to achieve a fit between academia and industry partners, industry perceptions (Xuehui & Jie, 2011) and the comparison of industry and student perceptions (Lee et al., 2009) are discussed.

To enhance student's knowledge so they are better prepared for positions within the convention sector upon graduation, Phelan and Mills (2011) made an exploratory study to articulate the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) required in this field. The opinions of convention managers and faculty members who teach convention-focused courses are collected and analyzed to construct five skill pillars for convention industry professionals, including planning skills, professionalism, work ethic, personality traits, and self management, as shown in Table 1.

Jones (2010) stated the shortage of MICE related degree programs and addresses how the first degree program in this field in Hong Kong was developed at Hong Kong Polytechnic University's School of Hotel and Tourism Management (SHTM) in 2009 and how the "blue ocean strategy" concept is utilized through co-creation sessions. Twelve members of the convention and event management task force were invited to express what subjects an entry-level manager must know to be successful in the industry. These subjects are required to establish a new degree that is differentiated from the current subjects offered from competition like North American universities to fill a need in the global market of convention and event education that is currently not being addressed. Eight subjects are determined as follows:

- Convention sales and service.
- Catering and banquet service management.
- Events tourism and management.
- Meeting management.
- Special topic in convention and events.
- Convention venue management.
- Exhibition management.
- Special event project I and II (a two-semester subject).

Fenich and Hashimoto (2010) integrated the directories of professional associations such as MPI (Meeting Professionals International) and PCMA (Professional Convention Management Association), extensive web searching of courses in universities, and the opinions of experts within this field to categorize coursework based on the geographic location of the program as "planning locations" and "hosting locations". Planning locations refer to the places where meetings/conventions/events are planned (but not necessarily delivered), like locations with numerous corporations (e.g., New York) or associations (Washington, DC). Thus, workforces tend to be trained or educated in planning skills. Hosting locations

Table 1

Five skill pillars for convention industry professionals.

Source: Phelan and Mills (2011).

Planning skills	Professionalism	Work ethic	Personality traits	Self management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organized • Customer service • Detail oriented • Critical thinking • Analytical skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal communication • Written communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand how the industry operates • Teamwork • Works well under pressure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outgoing • Positive personality • Good networking skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible • Creative • Integrity

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