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Work motivation, job burnout, and employment aspiration in hospitality and tourism students—An exploration using the self-determination theory[☆]



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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine a proposed structural equation model (SEM) using three constructs—work motivation, job burnout, and employment aspiration among hospitality and tourism (H&T) students. Participants comprised 927 students enrolled in hospitality and tourism study programmes who had completed the relevant internships. They were asked to complete a questionnaire, which included the Work Motivation Questionnaire, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), and one dichotomous question regarding their willingness to return to the H&T industry. Goodness-of-fit indices verified that the proposed SEM was appropriate for interpreting the relationships between the variables. This study revealed that, in general, the higher an individual's intrinsic motivation, the lower his/her job burnout will be. However, amotivation and introjected regulation did not have significant effects on job burnout. Instead, integrated regulation proved to be the strongest predictor of job burnout, and the reason for this was possibly linked to diminished personal accomplishment. Finally, job burnout did not correlate with H&T students' willingness to pursue careers in the H&T industry.

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1. Introduction

The onset and spread of globalisation has partly led to the H&T industry becoming the fastest growing in the world. Consequently, this industry requires a large number of highly qualified employees to join the workforce (King & Hang, 2011). In the same vein, in the past few years, there has been an increase in the number of international tourists coming into Taiwan; therefore, the local government has started to pay attention to the qualifications of professionals in the H&T industry. In response to this demand, higher education institutions (HEIs) in Taiwan have also committed to educate qualified employees for the industry. According to official data by the Ministry of Education (MOE), in the 2001 academic year, 15 HEIs offered hospitality programmes, and 23 HEIs had tourism management departments. By 2006 and 2010, the number of hospitality management departments had increased to 43 and 64, respectively. The number of tourism management departments also increased in these years, from 48 to 92, respectively.

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This boom in the number of H&T training programmes has been a popular research topic, as has the quality of education imparted to students through these programmes. Owing to prevailing discussions on curriculum design and pedagogy, scholars are drawn to the issue of the effectiveness or necessity of internships (Lam & Ching, 2007). Internships provide H&T students with the opportunity to gain hands-on operational experience (Ju, Emenheiser, Clayton, & Reynolds, 1998). In Taiwan, however, it is not unusual for some students who have successfully completed their internships to forego pursuing a career in the H&T industry (Fidgeon, 2010; Raybould & Wilkins, 2005). Possible reasons for this are the long working hours and biased working environment prevalent in Taiwan's H&T industry (Chen & Shen, 2012); such situations place interns under tremendous pressure that, as teenagers and novices to the industry, they are not equipped to handle. After working in an environment where their pre-existing negative perceptions about the industry are confirmed, students who find it difficult to deal with pressure, both physically and psychologically, will face job burnout in the workplace. This may deter them from pursuing a career in the H&T industry after their post-secondary education which, unfortunately, would be a loss to the industry, the government, and the H&T students. Therefore, it is necessary to have a thorough understanding of the association between students' work motivation, job burnout, and employment aspirations. This study's aims are threefold:

- (1) acquiring a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between H&T students' work motivation, job burnout, and employment aspirations;
- (2) establishing a structural equation model (SEM) to explore the causal relationships among the above-mentioned three variables; and
- (3) providing H&T industry stakeholders with empirical evidence about managerial and pedagogical practices.

To properly address the three proposed aims, it is necessary to first review relevant studies in order to develop the theoretical framework for the linear model of variables. Based on the proposed model, details on the research methodology—such as participants, the research procedure, and instrumentation—will be presented, followed by the results of the statistical analyses. These results will then facilitate a discussion of the similarities and differences between the results of this study and those of previous works. Finally, we articulate the implications of this study for the academic and industrial sectors and list some limitations of the research.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Work motivation and the self-determination theory (SDT)

Pinder (1998) coined the term 'work motivation' to mean 'a set of energetic forces that originate both within as well as beyond an individual's being, to initiate work-related behaviour, and to determine its form, direction, intensity, and duration' (p. 11). Over the past decades, many researchers have attempted to articulate the issue of employee work motivation from different perspectives. More recently, Boumans, de Jong, and Janssen (2011) elucidated how a person's age is associated with his/her job satisfaction and future employment aspirations. Their study indicated that older employees, compared to their younger counterparts, require more incentives to enhance their intrinsic motivation. Since younger employees tend to have stronger intrinsic motivation than older employees, employers prefer to hire younger people.

Another study conducted by Curral and Marques-Quinteiro (2009) focused on the work motivation of self-led employees and their goal orientation; their study revealed a positive correlation between intrinsic motivation and goal orientation. However, this relationship does not seem to apply in the public sector. Manolopoulos (2008) investigated the extrinsic motivation and driving force of Greek governmental officials towards their jobs; the results showed that a stronger power than intrinsic motivation was at play—extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation, as posited by Moynihan and Moynihan (2007), includes opportunities to provide public service, obtain promotions, feel a sense of achievement, and be part of a collective culture. Based on the findings of previous studies, it can be stated that motivation—regardless of whether it is intrinsic (self-commitment or self-achievement) or extrinsic (rewards or incentives)—will influence an employee's job performance in some way or the other. In fact, as early as 1975, advocates of the cognitive evaluation theory had emphasised the influence of external factors on intrinsic motivation, which drives behaviour for personal satisfaction. Based on the rationale of the cognitive evaluation theory, Deci and Ryan (1985) further explored the process of internalising the driving force towards a target, through the use of self-determination. Their theory is referred to as the self-determination theory (SDT), according to which, an individual's motivation is dynamic, rather than static (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). However, the cognitive evaluation theory regards motivation as static. Therefore, this theory probably overlooks different forms of motivation and its relationship with job burnout and employment aspiration.

The present study applies the SDT to examine the work motivation of H&T students who successfully completed their internships. The SDT systemises the process of internalisation of motivation into three categories: amotivation; extrinsic motivation; and intrinsic motivation. Depending on which category of motivation they fall into, people will be oriented differently and therefore behave accordingly (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2002). Based on these three classifications, six stages can be formulated as the process of internalisation of motivation. Most of the stages take place as internally regulated states in the transitions between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (presented in Fig. 1).

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