CrossMark

Comparing students' and managers' perceptions of essential entry-level management competencies in the hospitality industry: An empirical study

Lan Jiang [*], George Alexakis

Resort & Hospitality Management Program, Lutgert College of Business, Florida Gulf Coast University, USA

A B S T R A C T

The age-old higher education concern of graduates' industry relevancy coupled with the mounting program outcomes emphases of business schools led us to research program exit competencies. Our study determined knowledge and skills that employers most seek when hiring entry-level managers within the business discipline of hospitality management. We compared these results to student perceptions of industry-preferred managerial competencies. T-test, ANOVA, and regression analyses revealed findings suggesting that managers and students have different perceptions regarding entry-level managerial competencies. We discuss research implications, practical suggestions, and future recommendations about identifying the most essential management competencies for graduates to effect curricular changes.

1. Introduction

What management competencies are necessary for industry success? Do students have different perceptions of their education than do business employers? These are some of the first questions on the minds of virtually every new faculty member in the business fields. Business industry employers often complain about finding college graduates with relevant skills and knowledge (Klimoski & Amos, 2012). Assorted business discipline programs challenged to strike the balance between service industry practitioner training and academic education often rely on boards of advisors for comment and counsel. The diverging situation where industry practitioners expect certain competencies but students deliver another set features in the hospitality management area. The hospitality discipline features a long history of interacting with their advisory boards, as they continually strive to attain relevancy. The tightly related nexus between undergraduate hospitality management programs and the hospitality industry effectively commenced in the 1920s with the establishment of Cornell University hotel management program (Kay & Russette, 2000). Since then, and especially since the 1980s (Weber, Crawford, Lee, & Dennison, 2013), educators have identified essential competencies needed by hospitality management graduates (Kay & Russette, 2000). Informal face-to-face professional interactions provide important information on knowledge and skills that industry employers want (Barrows & Walsh, 2002). Advisor boards

---

* Corresponding author.
  E-mail addresses: ljiang@fgcu.edu, galexaki@fgcu.edu (L. Jiang,>,Alexakis.

meet such needs. However, systematized research on the actual management competencies preferred by employers provides evidenced-based data that are more definitive and robust. Because education should be geared to prepare students for future managerial roles, not just their first jobs (Gray, Ottesen, Bell, Chapman, & Whiten, 2007), it is imperative that hospitality program curricula reflect the currently favored management knowledge and skills among employers. Fluctuations in the competitive environment of business and education along with changes in the macro-environment point to the need for organic curriculum reform in hospitality management (Johanson, Ghiselli, Shea, & Roberts, 2011; Kalargyrou, Pescosolido, & Kalargiros, 2012). Johanson et al. (2011) called for new data from industry professionals to guide the educational process in the hospitality discipline.

John Locke (1685: 43) stated, "No man's [sic] knowledge can go beyond his experience." Our study sought to explore this confine by answering the age-old question: What competencies are required for management success in the hospitality industry? Our focus comprised of not only industry preferences, but also the extent to which these preferences correspond with student perceptions of industry desires. It represents an exciting starting point for educators that seek to continuously evolve their curricula during dynamically changing times.

To create cogent understanding the large literature (Stevens, Beyer, & Trice, 1978), we began by organizing the mostly empirical studies on the topics of hospitality industry managers' knowledge and skills. "Very few published studies in the hospitality literature have evaluated skill sets and key competencies based solely on industry demands" (Johanson et al., 2011). This makes sense, since undergraduate hospitality programs are not just training centers for industry. "Many universities are now considering the graduate attributes of their students" (Becket & Brookes, 2012: 79). Although numerous researchers have measured management competencies perceived by hospitality industry professionals in recent decades, few studies have concurrently compared and contrasted those perceptions with those of hospitality undergraduate students (e.g., Wang and Tsai, 2014). The findings of a two-phase study by Gross and Manoharan (2016) evidenced the value of examining the views of graduates. In short, the general consensus among scholars and practitioners is that hospitality curriculum must consist of important leadership and management competencies to produce more productive and effective graduates in both theory and practical (Nelson & Dopson, 2001; Shariff, Kayat, & Abidin, 2014).

The literature formed the basis of our study's research design. We examined the topic of most essential management competencies for entry-level hospitality management positions by identifying such preferences through formal research to potentially inform hospitality management education decisions at the program, curricular, and course levels. That was the main purpose of our study.

Our study derived data regarding curriculum for future leaders from two sources: industry and students. We compared and contrasted the views of these hospitality education stakeholder groups. We compared the perceptions of employers and students related to essential managerial competencies. We identified any possible incongruities between what industry professionals and students deem as important managerial competencies. Through the analysis of empirical data, we were able to assess both curricular relevance, through contrasting managers' and student views, and its effectiveness, through comparing students' views with those of managers (Gray et al., 2007). We also discussed the practical implications of employer and student opinions to engage a variety of readers and provide suggestions for future research directions so that hospitality programs can make informed curricular decisions.

2. Literature review

2.1. Learning and educational competencies of graduates

An exhaustive literature review predicates innovative primary education research for the management disciplines. Our review of the related literature reports everything from seminal to current cutting-edge research. Important theories, robust methods and procedures, and substantive results that have contributed to the business disciplines or hospitality management comprise our literature review below.

When considering literature about professors conducting scholarship or students enrolled in a class, we quickly find that learning undoubtedly represents the main goal of education. Few would argue that what an instructor teaches constitutes that which a student learns. The assessment of student learning unsurprisingly keeps increasing on the national higher education agenda (Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014). A recent Association of American Colleges and Universities study indicated that employers are concerned about graduates having a range of skills in areas like communication and teamwork. In a number of important areas (oral communication, written communication, critical thinking, being creative), however, students are more than twice as likely as employers to think that students are being well prepared (Jaschik, 2015).

Criticism of higher education learning outcomes in the management disciplines literature remains a worldwide trend (Jackson & Chapman, 2012). Human capital is undeniably a hospitality organization's most valuable resource and potentially one of the most sustainable competitive advantages (Brownell, 2007). Knowledge management continues to replace tangible resources (such as capital, land, and labor) as a main source of competitive advantage (Okumus, 2013). The outcomes and knowledge management discussions have particular importance in the highly applied hospitality industry that typically seeks work readiness among graduates in entry-level management positions (Chillas, Marks, & Galloway, 2015; Wang, 2013). The complexity of the hospitality managers forecasting and decision making activities represents another distinguishing factor of this business discipline, as it necessitates specific requirements beyond those of general management in other business disciplines (Pirnar, 2014). Developing graduates who are critical and analytical thinkers over excessively focusing on content relevance (Lashley, 2015) seemingly contrasts with our study. However, research results presented in our study and related literature are to be regarded as a starting point (as opposed to a terminal end) for curriculum revisions. Hospitality faculties presumably account for their own industry, consulting, and