

MANAGEMENT EDUCATION IN THE USA

How much practical hotel management education is necessary?

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Introduction

A major issue in hotel management education is the continuing debate as to how desirable "hands-on" work experiences are for effective application of classroom learning to actual managerial situations. Such practical work experiences and other types of experiential learning have become accepted components of the curriculum in the academic disciplines of education, hotel management, business administration, agriculture and medicine. In all these academic fields, there is common agreement that some form of experiential or practical hands-on work experience is needed to best educate the student in the most effective application of the theoretical classroom content.

Nichols[1], for example, argues that those programmes requiring students to have field experiences best bridge the gap between theory and practice. These experiences give students the opportunity to practice the theory learned in the classroom. Paprock[2] supports the value of experiential learning by reporting interviews with educators. These experts believe that students cannot learn all the skills and competences they must master to be effective in a changing and dynamic world without going outside the confines of the traditional classroom setting.

Since all professionals will be increasingly challenged by an unprecedented need to anticipate and adapt to change, students must learn to adapt and manage both well-defined situations and those which present unusual difficulties and anomalies similar to those they will face in the future. Practical work provides students with an environment in which they can learn how to manage these types of situations successfully. A goal of practicum programmes is to prepare students to become reflective practitioners who are able to make good real-life decisions in light of sound theory, according to Bagheri[3]. Gormley[4] reports that educators he surveyed cited their practical experience as the greatest contributor to their success as teachers.

Experiential learning

There is a wide variety of experiential learning methods that are available to produce the practical experience desired. One type is clinical experience. In defining an approach for teacher education, Nichols[1] terms his approach the comprehensive scope and sequence model. This model defines five hierarchical levels of clinical experiences which students should have as part of their total educational experience. These are from the lowest to the highest level of practical experience: college class-

room practice activities; campus laboratory practice activities; short-time practicum field experiences in local schools for one semester; one semester of student teaching; and first-year teaching follow-up support services. Each level offers the student a progressively more intensive integration of classroom theory with practical experience.

Another type of clinical experience is described by Dworet[5]. He proposes a one-year post baccalaureate programme for teachers, based on his belief that students, in order to understand effective teaching truly, should actively observe others teaching, engage in dialogues about teaching, and then reflect on their own as well as other's styles.

The effectiveness of these ideas is supported by the empirical research. Oesterreich[6] reports the results of a questionnaire which asked for an evaluation of teacher training by young teachers. The most common suggestion from these respondents was that educators should provide more practical training if they wish to produce better teachers. A study by Unyakiat[7], seeking to measure the effectiveness of college preparation programmes for students of communicative language teaching, found that the majority of teachers of English as a foreign language recommended a trip to an English-speaking country as the most effective method for providing students with an opportunity to master their individual language skills effectively.

Educators in hotel management have also discussed and studied the value of experiential learning. Many leading researchers in hotel management education, such as Casado[8], Knight[9], Tas[10] and Canterino[11] argue strongly that such learning experiences are a vital part of the academic training necessary to master this field of study. Tas, for example, supporting earlier work by Mariampolski *et al.*, (cited in [10]) states that hotel management programmes should develop experiences that allow students to have positive interactions with others through some form of practical work experiences.

Casado[8] conducted an empirical investigation of the perceptions of 150 corporate recruiters of hotel and restaurant students, 150 alumni of

restaurant students, 150 alumni of those programmes and 16 educators about critical factors of hotel and restaurant programmes. Specifically, he measured the degree to which each group believed the hospitality curriculum met their needs, what qualities they felt were predictors of success and which characteristics of the faculty and the programme they felt best represented quality. Casado found that all respondents believe that supervised practical training in an industry setting was of high importance. On the basis of his results, Casado recommends providing hotel management students with an internship or some equivalent practical hands-on experience in order to be properly prepared for careers in this industry.

In an earlier study, Hayes[12] investigated the relationship between academic performance of students who had a required work experience as part of their curriculum with those students who did not. He found no relationship between academic performance as measured by Grade Point Average (GPA) and work experiences. In spite of these results, Wisch[13] argues that students seeking quality undergraduate hotel management education expect the curriculum to include practical experience. Therefore, such experiences should be required as parts of the curriculum in order to meet these expectations whether or not they were important on any other basis. Knight[9] reported results from his survey of 29 educators, 20 trainers and 183 trainees, who all agreed that programmes in hotel management should provide greater emphasis on technical and practical curriculum as well as expand actual on-the-job training in order to develop essential managerial traits.

Studies undertaken by other researchers outside the field of hotel education provide additional support for the need for experiential or practical education as an integral part of the education curriculum. In the field of personnel management, Forney[14] examined student attitudes towards an experience-based component as part of the preparation of students for careers in this field. He found that students from 16 programmes viewed such experiential components as a positive part of their preparation for careers in personnel.

LeBruto and Murray[15] reported on the perceptions of entering hotel management students, faculty and corporate recruiters as to the importance of "hands-on" or practical experience in delivering ten management skills and competences. Respondents evaluated each skill and competence on a five-point Likert scale (not important, not very important, neutral, somewhat important, and very important). These skills and competences were: solving customer problems; human resource management skills; oral communication; written communication; basic management principles; positive peer relationships; food, beverage, and labour cost control; professional standards; knowledge of ethics; and professional appearance and poise. For all three groups and for all skills and competences, the mean response was between somewhat important and very important, with the exception of the faculty response to professional appearance and poise which was between neutral and somewhat important.

In a study of archivists, Gabehart[16] identified the qualifications most desired by employers for entry-level positions. He found that employers believed it was important to identify job candidates who possess both practical training and educational preparation. Qtaishat[17], in a survey of accounting practitioners, also sought to identify their perceptions about what should be included in an accounting curriculum. These respondents also indicated that practical training should be part of the curriculum.

A study assessing student perception of the type of preparation desirable for a career in business as part of a college business curriculum was performed by Ibrahim[18]. His survey of recent graduates of a banking studies course reports that a significant percentage (80.4 per cent) rated practical training as very helpful or helpful. In response to an additional question about the preferred duration of such practical training, a similarly significant percentage of the students believed that the practical training component was not long enough.

Without question, the workplace provides an environment conducive to learning. Cunningham[19], in an extensive study of learning in the

workplace, concluded that everyone learns at work, with new employees learning more than experienced workers. The study also found that new employees learn most from the experienced workers. Findlay[20] agrees by stating that agricultural teachers acquire their competences from practical on-the-job experiences. From the student perspective, Cox[21] reported that agricultural students preferred learning environments where they were active and involved in practical experiences.

In the attempt to bring more practical education into the classroom environment, Scanlon and Newcomb [22] suggested that educators need to develop and then provide alternative methods of instruction when practical training outside of the institution is not possible. For example, Lobeck and Stone[23] report a successful mentor programme from the medical education field. At the University of Wisconsin Medical School, senior faculty members attended classes in order to share their practical experiences with students to show the relevance of the classroom material better. This educational experience can correct some of the imbalance reported by Stemmler[24] in medical education by finding the best combination between theoretical and practical education. Another good example of this is a programme at East Carolina University, which provides first-year students hands-on experience for students in sports medicine to enhance the learning process as reported by Compton[25].

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the appropriate optimum amount of experiential education in hotel management education and to determine if this optimum amount is significantly different between the three major stakeholders of hospitality education: faculty, students, and recruiters. If the quality of hotel education is dependent on such practical hands-on training, then it is important to discover whether the faculty, students, and recruiters of hotel programme graduates believe in a similar amount of this educational experience as a necessary and integral part of the hotel management curriculum.

Methodology

There are 126 institutions in the USA which offer bachelors programmes in hotel and hospitality management, of which about 80 per cent require some form of practical hands-on experience for graduation, according to the Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education (CHRIE) [26]. The ten hotel management programmes were selected on the basis of their quality levels based on rankings synthesized in studies reported by Gourman[27], Calnan[28] and Corgel[29]. Other factors considered in selecting the programmes for comparison were programme enrolment, the college where the programme is located within the university, and the specific practicum work experience requirements. This purposive sampling resulted in selecting the following ten programmes: Cornell University, University of North Texas, University of New Hampshire, University of Houston, Northern Arizona University, Purdue University, Michigan State University, University of New Orleans, Florida International University, and University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

All of these schools require students to complete a practical work experience outside of the educational setting. At the University of Houston, for example, students are required to have 800 clock hours of increasing responsibility with 400 of the hours concentrated in the area of food and beverage and 400 hours in hotel operations. The University of North Texas requires a six credit hour course in practical experience that includes 320 hours of work in the industry and attendance at a weekly class. At Florida International University, for

example, all students must work a minimum 800 clock hours in the industry as a graduation requirement. In addition, the programme requires 200 hours of an advanced internship project and a paper. Other programmes are similar in their requirements.

The hotel faculty surveyed from these ten selected programmes were also members of CHRIE. The 123 identified faculty members were sent a letter along with the survey instrument and a return addressed stamped envelope. There were 83 total responses of which 76 were usable for a response rate of 67.5 per cent and a usable response rate of 61.8 per cent.

To gather data on student perceptions, a faculty member at each of the ten universities was asked to gather survey data from students entering each hotel management programme. A total of 289 valid student responses were received from eight schools. Since the study was designed to compare responses by faculty, students, and recruiters, data were analysed using the chi-square, and *t*-tests of means to measure significance.

To gather data on employers' perceptions of the optimum amount of the experiential hands-on component of the education programmes in hotel administration, all United States-based employers in the hotel sector (corporate recruiters) representing major hotel management organizations operating more than 25 full service hotels as identified in the American Hotel and Motel Association's 1991 *Directory of Hotel and Motel Systems*[30] were surveyed. The rationale for selecting

companies with 25 or more properties was that these companies would probably have a national or regional presence, recruiting systems and formal training programmes. Companies that operate as referral groups or associations and foreign organizations were not included.

The survey was mailed to the 82 companies identified and 26 responded for a return rate of 32 per cent. These responding companies represented almost 10 per cent of all hotel management companies and approximately half of total rooms inventory and hotel properties in the USA.

Results

Table I is a summary of the responses from faculty, students and recruiters relative to their perception of the amount of practical work experience required for a graduating hotel management student.

If the two-tailed *t*-test value was less than 0.05, then the means would be significantly different. Therefore faculty, students, and recruiters could have responded differently to the question of the optimum number of hours of practical experience that are appropriate, depending on which group they were in (faculty, students, recruiters). The results of the two tailed *t*-test were as follows: for the faculty group and the student group, $p = 0.068$; for the faculty group and the recruiter group, $p = 0.362$; and for the student group and the recruiter group, $p = 0.116$. None of these *t*-tests was significant at $p = 0.05$. Although the recruiters responded with the highest optimum number of hours, followed by the faculty, and then the students, these differences were not

Table I. Faculty, student, and recruiter responses

Amount of practicum hours	Faculty		Student		Recruiter	
	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)
None	0	0.00	2	0.71	1	7.69
200 or less	5	6.67	20	7.12	0	0.00
201-400	6	8.00	40	14.23	1	7.69
401-600	9	12.00	44	15.66	1	7.69
601-800	23	30.67	87	30.96	0	0.00
801-1,000	22	29.33	55	19.57	7	53.85
Over 1,000	10	13.33	33	11.74	3	23.08
Total	75	100.00	281	99.99	13	100.00

significant. The mean for number of hours worked for all three groups was between 401 hours and 800 hours.

Conclusion

The literature has been consistent in indicating that a practical hands-on component should be required in hotel management programmes. There is evidence that this type of learning is appropriate in other disciplines, and students expect to have a practical experience. Practical hands-on experience is also important in delivering skills and competences in hotel management, and as such has a place in hotel management education.

The contribution of this study was the fact that there is no significant difference in the optimum amount of hands-on work experience necessary in hotel management as viewed by faculty, students and recruiters.

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