

Hospitality Management Education and Accreditation:

Responses to a Changing World

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Extended Abstract

Covid and the resulting changes to hospitality in terms of tourism organisation, production and practices have had an impact on the higher education landscape. Requirements for online and blended delivery as well changes in structure and content have all challenged the current bachelor's degree format. Technological disruption impacts more and more the format of higher education, to the extent that some leading companies in the IT industry no longer mandate a degree for recruitment to a career in the field. Hospitality management has been defined as a hybrid combining various disciplines in its application. Validity of the programmes is more defined by the industry's willingness to recruit graduates rather than a formal disciplinary accreditation/standardization, despite the role of national governmental regularity bodies. This study's aim was to understand the various forces in place that are changing the nature of hospitality and hospitality education needs. It also identified perceived gaps between industry needs, the regulatory framework, and the format of a bachelor's degree. Desk based research was conducted to collect secondary data to identify the various educational frameworks adopted by the sampled organisations and the accreditation framework in which they operated. Primary research was conducted in various Higher Education Institutions (HEI) specialising in Hospitality Management. Thematic analysis was conducted and organised along national accreditation bodies, benchmarking used for quality assurance, best practices, and graduate attributes that reflect the current digitalisation of work. Results show the need to define Hospitality Management education in the 21st century in a way that better reflects industry needs in the face of technological mutations. The paper argues that a way to solidify the value proposition of hospitality management as a field, would be to establish a common framework of quality. This common framework could support

stakeholders, graduates, educators, employers, and regulators in achieving mobility and flexibility when developing curricula and graduate capabilities.

Future of hospitality and hospitality jobs

As the industry and its demands are constantly changing, it is important that higher education institutions are continually updating their curricula and course content and adapting accordingly to the industry's needs, as stated by Wilks and Hemsworth (2011) and more recently Alexakis and Jiang (2019).

Current disruption from technology in several economic sectors with machine learning ability to replace SOPs impact the way work is delivered, Remote work, home office, and major changes accelerated by Covid 19, have resulted in tourism and hospitality practices are now shaped differently. Two-fold types of changes: employment expectations and needs in the future, and tourism and leisure practices that will impact the nature of hospitality management. For instance, WEF in 2019 defined that more than 40% of current jobs will be replaced by 2025.

These changes are supporting notions of lifelong learning, transversal learning, transferable skills, and critical thinking that are all already advocated in higher education, with an assumed common understanding of what makes a well-rounded graduate, yet current models do not necessarily reflect these changed needs.

As Wilks and Hemsworth (2011) have defined in their research, education must equip graduates with relevant management competencies to prepare them for industry. Integrating education and practical training is also essential to meet industry stakeholder demands (Wilks and Hemsworth, 2011). Kim and Jeong (2018) add that industry experience, such as internships, is an integral part of hospitality education programs since they are among the most effective tools of experiential learning and are valued by the industry. According to Ferreras-Garcia, Sales-Zaguirre, and Serradell-López (2019), internships reinforce theoretical and practical training and enable students to apply their knowledge and develop competencies in the labour market. Therefore, managerial studies are one aspect, but practical experience is identified as another relevant component of hospitality higher education.

Therefore, it is essential that hospitality education responds and adjusts to current and future industry and academic needs. Students, faculty, and institutions are questioning the mode and model of learning including core disciplines and timelines and are rethinking the design of these programs. For instance, regulatory standards across many jurisdictions prescribe a rigid model that lack reflexivity and are therefore slow to respond to global educational trends.

Course curricula should be based on industry understanding and relevant graduate competencies, such as self-management, communication, emotional intelligence, interpersonal relations, critical thinking, and leadership. These skills are also identified as crucial by Alexakis and Jiang (2019) to prepare graduates for management roles instead of just entry-level positions. In addition, Christou and Chatzigeorgiou's (2019) research states that graduates must be multi-departmental and bring together multiple skills and competencies to be attractive and, therefore, relevant to the industry. Therefore, management studies in hospitality must be multi-dimensional to meet industry demands. Yet, the level of disruption for higher education soon remains unresolved. In this light, defining the quality of education and relevance to the job market becomes central.

Quality Frameworks for HEIs

According to literature research by Brockerhoff, Huisman, and Laufer (2015), quality is a multidimensional, multifaceted, dynamic, and multi-level concept without a singular definition or approach. However, quality and attention towards it have played an important role in higher education since the 1980s. Over time, governments have been seen as responsible for providing and regulating public higher education, access, and teaching staff. As a result, a general trust existed in the governments doing things right. However, from the 1980s, some governments gave more autonomy to HEIs with the responsibility to also account for the quality of learning offered.

Quality is, and can, only be achieved when standards and specifications are met or even surpassed with a focus on effectiveness and efficiency (Brockerhoff, Huisman, and Laufer, 2015). Even though it is challenging to define and is relative depending on the individual standard, quality in higher education is seen as proven when established agencies accredit an institution. Today, quality systems have become an integral part of higher education systems (Brockerhoff, Huisman, and Laufer, 2015) although these quality systems are applied in a variety of ways across a variety of jurisdictions.

As drivers, the definitions and approaches of quality are benchmark criteria that can be used to assess quality. Therefore, four basic value systems need to be highlighted,

- control in the form of rules and procedures and the question of whether the HEI provides graduates with the necessary knowledge and skills according to National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs).
- continuous improvement to exceed expectations, requirements, outcomes, and commitment toward good and future-oriented education.
- redesign, reinvention, and modern teaching approaches that prepares students for the future.
- curricula that reflect operational quality, standards, and content assurance (Brockhoff, Huisman, and Laufer, 2015).

Research of higher education quality by Brockhoff, Huisman, and Laufer (2015) has shown that institutional autonomy, multi-vocal government arrangements, and decentralised boards with less regulatory power positively affect the features of HEIs and their efficiency. Many hospitality HEIs are private institutions with autonomy, economic and financial links to the industry, however, the boundaries have blurred, and public institutions also rely on private resources, tuition fees, and business connections while they remain under more public and governmental regulations. Nevertheless, rules and regulations also apply to private institutions. Therefore, accountability, transparency, forward visions, and standards are essential to be accredited as an HEI. Regulatory bodies operate generally at national level and apply and national hierarchy of knowledge and competences through the NQF and accredit HEIs based on these criteria but not on specific discipline-based elements that are usually defined by international sectoral bodies.

To connect the current context with Hospitality HEIs practices and situation, a qualitative approach was adopted whereby interviews were conducted with hospitality HEIs in five countries across 3 continents, based on the internationalisation of their hospitality programs and their influential role in the field, identified by QS ranking of each of the higher education institutions represented in the study.

Discussion

Findings included a contrasted view of support for HEI from their own national regulatory bodies. When asked about the graduates that are “produced” at the HEI, it is shown that there has been a change in required skills over time and, therefore, a shift in graduate capabilities. Consequently, the capabilities are less defined at the HEIs and are mainly about individual personality and industry skills. This shows a dissonance between the definition of educational delivery and the desire for customized learning experiences that are difficult to fit in the standardized regulations. The latter is becoming a possibility through technological support and self-paced learning that challenge one-size fit all approach to education.

All interviewees highlight the importance of establishing and maintaining industrial relations and state that this is highly significant and well-established at their respective institutions. However, no HEI focuses on one single partner but rather on various groups and chains. When asked about the outcome of the education for the graduate at the respective HEI, the interviewees generally mention an open outcome that is not limited to one industry or the hospitality industry. This can be interpreted as a lack of definition of the specific nature and components of Hospitality Management Education. The field opens to other economic sectors yet is seldom recognized as a distinctive discipline of studies. A comparison with other disciplines shows that many are regulated for graduates as professions (medicine, engineering, law, architecture, etc), however hospitality as a field doesn’t have a defining specific international standard, in the same way business studies has with AACSB or EQUIS.

When asked for their evaluation of the adoption of change at the HEI, governmental bodies, and accreditation bodies, all interviewees stated that there is room for adjustments and changes within all bodies. All participants highlight that guidelines are essential for quality assurance however these slow changes and restrict responsiveness to stakeholder needs. From the studies it was found that the working agreement between the ICE-NVAO in The Netherlands can be considered as one of the best practices.

Recommendation

The researchers recommend that THE -ICE committee conduct bachelor level mapping for hospitality education, such a mapping can assist all THE-ICE members in benchmarking their programs for best practice as per the international standards such as ACCSB or other business professional bodies.

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