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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to examine the perceived importance and perceived experiences of career factors for hospitality management graduates and to examine differences in perceptions of hospitality graduates who left the hospitality industry with those who stayed. In addition, differences in perceptions between hospitality graduates and hiring managers were examined. Compared to those who had left the industry, hospitality graduates working in the hospitality industry indicated 11 factors were more important to them. Examples of these factors included having a career where graduates use their degree and a career with good promotion prospects. Graduates who left the hospitality industry indicated it was more important to have a career where they could contribute to society as compared to graduates that stayed in the industry. Hiring managers perceived their organizations offered more in a career than the graduates expected or deemed important which contradicts the findings from the graduates.

Keywords

Career experiences, Career importance, Hiring manager, Hospitality education, Motivation

Disciplines

Hospitality Administration and Management | Human Resources Management

Comments

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Title: Hospitality management graduates' perceptions of career factor importance and career factor experience

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Abstract: The purpose of this research was to examine the perceived importance and perceived experiences of career factors for hospitality management graduates and to examine differences in perceptions of hospitality graduates who left the hospitality industry with those who stayed. In addition, differences in perceptions between hospitality graduates and hiring managers were examined. Compared to those who had left the industry, hospitality graduates working in the hospitality industry indicated 11 factors were more important to them. Examples of these factors included having a career where graduates use their degree and a career with good promotion prospects. Graduates who left the hospitality industry indicated it was more important to have a career where they could contribute to society as compared to graduates that stayed in the industry. Hiring managers perceived their organizations offered more in a career than the graduates expected or deemed important which contradicts the findings from the graduates.

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career experiences, career importance, hiring manager, hospitality education, motivation

1. Introduction

Previous researchers have examined hospitality management graduates within the hospitality industry for many reasons. Walsh and Taylor (2007) examined graduates from specific higher education institutions and Richardson (2009) examined current students' perceptions and expectations of careers in hospitality and tourism upon graduation. Blomme, Van Rheede, and Tromp (2009) found differences between pre- and post-entry job expectations of hospitality management graduates in the hospitality industry. The current research study focused on the experiences and importance of career factors to hospitality graduates with comparisons to line managers' perceptions. For purposes of this research, career factors were identified as factors present at different levels within different industries that influence decisions on career choice (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000). Motivational theory was used when examining the career factors that influence graduates when choosing a particular career.

If hospitality graduates are entering the industry without an accurate understanding of the industry, this could be the cause of many leaving the hospitality industry. With hospitality management graduates not entering the hospitality industry, and instead working in other areas, it is important to determine where gaps exist so educators and practitioners can address needed changes.

The purpose of this research was to determine the perceived importance and experiences of career factors in the hospitality industry for recent hospitality management graduates. In other words, the researchers examined what recent hospitality management graduates viewed as important factors in a career and whether they experienced these important factors in their hospitality career. Hospitality management graduates still in, and those that left, the hospitality industry were examined. In addition, career factor perceptions of hiring managers in the

hospitality industry and then compared this information to the two groups of graduates. Previous research has examined career factors in the hospitality industry and found lack of clarity in student perceptions and expectations (Richardson, 2008). Blomme, et al. (2009) found differences in expectations of hospitality students once they enter the industry. The following objectives guided this study:

1. examine differences in perceptions of career factor importance and career factor experience of hospitality graduates relative to whether or not they remained in the hospitality industry; and
2. explore hiring managers' perceptions of what potential applicants want in a hospitality career (tied to career factor importance of graduates) and what the manager's company has to offer (tied to career factor experiences of graduates).

1.1. Significance of study

Kuslivan and Kuslivan (2000) suggested realistic expectations would lead hospitality graduates to remain in the hospitality industry. Richardson (2009) found expectations of hospitality and tourism graduates to be important when considering which career to choose. In addition to Kuslivan and Kuslivan, researchers (Chuang, Goh, Stout, & Dellmann-Jenkin, 2007), researchers have stated the importance of experience in addition to education. This research further supports these claims.

Lu and Adler (2008) found 32% of hospitality graduates intended to leave the hospitality industry, the current study will compare this to hospitality graduates who have been in the industry for up to ten years. Walsh and Taylor (2007) found intellectual challenges to be important in retaining employees. This study contributes to this research by showing a gap between the importance of intellectual challenges and what hospitality graduates are

experiencing. If Walsh and Taylor are correct, this should be of concern to hospitality researchers, educators, and industry professionals.

2. Literature review

There are several career factor and choice theories; for purposes of this study, motivational theory was used to assist in understanding why certain career factors were selected. Two types of motivation were examined in relation to career factors: intrinsic and extrinsic. In the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) intrinsic motivations and extrinsic motivations are contrasted. Intrinsic references, “doing something because it is interesting or enjoyable” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, pg. 55) for example, choosing a career because it is enjoyable. In contrast, extrinsic motivation references, “doing something to attain some separable outcome” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, pg. 60). An extrinsic motivation for career choice would be choosing a career because it had a good starting salary.

2.1. Career experiences and perceptions

Richardson (2009) mentioned tourism and hospitality students are unclear about careers and working conditions in the hospitality industry and expressed the importance of examining career factors. Wong and Ko (2009) found important factors in determining a career of hotel employees to be: available free time, workplace support, flexible work schedule, allegiance to work, ability to voluntarily reduce hours, and working extra hours leading to rewards. Wong and Ko’s (2009) findings show a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors to be important based on Ryan and Deci’s (2000) definitions.

Career factors that are important to employees led Blomme et al. (2009) to argue that discrepancies in what employees expect in the hotel industry and what they experience may lead to negative consequences. These are distinct differences in expectations of job content,

development opportunities, work-family balance, salary, performance-related pay, and career opportunities (Blomme et al., 2009). For instance, Kim, Hallab, and Lee (2009) found a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators to be the most valued factors in the hospitality and tourism industry: interesting work, having benefits, and good working conditions. The least valued factors included location, training, and supervisor. The authors noted as graduates advanced professionally, salary, an extrinsic motivator, became the most valued factor.

Taking into account the diversity of hospitality students, Richardson (2010) found that international students were more likely to pursue a hospitality career because more of their career factors would be met. The author argued if international students had a more positive image of the industry then perhaps they should be targeted by hospitality companies as the hospitality industry may be more likely to meet the international students' career factor preferences.

Considering age diversity, there has been a variety of research assessing career expectations, desires, and perceptions of Gen Y employees. Interestingly, in their study of hospitality management students who were in generation Y, Choi and Kwon (2013) found that attitudes about workplace fun had an effect on hospitality job attitudes and behaviors. The researchers suggested that hospitality managers recognize that Gen Y employees are interested in having fun at work. Thus, it is reasonable to consider structuring work in a way that is fun to attract this new generation to hospitality jobs. Aside from a fun workplace, Maxwell, Ogden, and Broadbridge (2010) found that hospitality and tourism undergraduate students in Scotland valued career factors including promotion, good pay and job security.

Although this review has focused primarily on hospitality management students, it should be noted that the literature outside the hospitality field has illustrated similar findings, that a variety of factors influence career decisions. For example, research by Xu (2013) found all

college graduates consider pay, job status, and satisfaction with promotion opportunities as dominate career choice factors. In addition, Xu found individuals who have an occupation closely related to their major had higher job satisfaction. Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000) found pay to be less of a factor, but enjoyable career to be the most important motivator.

2.2. Education importance

Ayres (2006) found 4 of 10 tourism managers interviewed believed education had no influence on their career path. Four managers in the study expressed the importance of education for their current and future positions and the remaining two managers were unsure. Marchante, Ortega, and Pagán (2007) further examined the connection between education and careers in the hospitality industry. The authors defined the term educational mismatch as individuals with too much education or insufficient education for their current positions. The authors found over half of the respondents to be educationally mismatched. Individuals without adequate education for their current position compensated for the lack of education with more experience.

There are not a set core of courses at the variety of institutions individuals can earn a hospitality degree. Therefore, there will be a variety of different course materials, skills, and competencies learned by graduates. Müller, VanLeeuwen, Mandabach, and Harrington (2009) indicated that hospitality graduates do not have sufficient problem solving skills, computer skills, and oral communication skills. Nevertheless, Lee (2007) recognized hospitality and tourism students who participated in industry based learning had a better understanding of how organizations operate, a more realistic understanding of career expectations, a larger network of industry contacts, an increased initiative and ability to adapt to change, and increased leadership and financial skills.

2.3. Careers and education

Roney and Öztin (2007) found students without work experience had neither a favorable nor an unfavorable perception of tourism careers. However, when students completed work experiences in college, their perceptions of the tourism industry were affected in a negative way due to irregular working hours, lacking job security (Roney & Öztin, 2007), low pay, and lack of development opportunities (Lu & Adler, 2008). Richardson (2008) found 46% of hospitality and tourism students with work experience claimed they would not work in the hospitality industry after they graduated because of their work experiences in the industry. Of the students who had not worked in the industry, all intended to work in the hospitality industry once they graduated. Therefore, high career expectations can cause issues if not met (Richardson, 2009), so giving students an accurate depiction of a career is important (Richardson, 2009; Roney & Öztin, 2007).

Students who had positive attitudes towards their internship experiences and training had greater job satisfaction and confidence once in a career (Ko, 2007). Lu and Adler (2008) found 68% of participating hospitality students intended to enter the hospitality industry upon graduation. Top reasons for entering the industry included opportunities for employment and growth, ability to apply knowledge learned in school, opportunities to meet new people, and personal interests (Lu & Adler, 2008). In addition, Kim, McCleary, and Kaufman (2010) found students wanted to go into the hotel/lodging industry due to promotion and leadership development opportunities.

Other researchers have taken it a step further and examined what within an educational program led to more successful graduates. Chi and Gursoy (2009) suggested the key aspects that led to a successful career and placement program within hospitality education were the internship requirements, the mentoring and student preparation for interviews, the reputation and quality of the hospitality program, the industry experience of hospitality faculty, and the quality

of the curriculum and courses taught. If a university could increase the hospitality program's placement rate, then more students would want to enroll in the program and thereby more would be placed (Robinson, Barron, & Solnet, 2008).

2.4. Literature review conclusions

Previous researchers have shown more realistic expectations are obtained when students receive work experience in the hospitality industry and commonly these more realistic expectations lead to negative perceptions of the industry (Lu & Adler, 2008; Roney & Öztin, 2009). In addition, those students who have the experiences are more likely to decide against entering the industry (Richardson, 2008). However, other research has shown when expectations are accurately met, the students have better experiences when entering the industry (Kim, et al., 2009; Richardson, 2010; Wong & Ko, 2009). This research was designed to fill a gap in the current research, determining what former students who are currently in, or have left, the hospitality industry are experiencing and which career factors they now find important. Once this is answered, the information can be used to provide current students with a more accurate educational and work-place experience.

3. Research methods

This research study was designed to analyze factors that influence career choices of hospitality graduates, both those that stayed in the industry and those that left the industry. The focus was on the perceptions of career factor importance and career factor experience of hospitality graduates. This research study included three nearly identical questionnaires, one for hospitality graduates still working in the industry, one for those that had left, and one for the hiring managers of hospitality graduates.

3.1 Participants

The target population for this research study was graduates from hospitality, tourism, and culinary arts programs in the United States in the last ten years. Hospitality programs were identified using *The Guide to College Programs in Hospitality, Tourism, & Culinary Arts* (International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education, 2006). In order to participate, graduates had to be from a U.S. program offering a four-year degree program. The researchers identified 121 eligible programs, of which all program or department heads were contacted via email and asked to distribute the questionnaire link to their alumni or provide alumni contact information.

3.2 Instruments

Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000) developed a 20-statement questionnaire designed to examine job factors based on importance and expectations within a teaching career. Richardson (2009) later adapted this questionnaire for use with tourism and hospitality students. The researchers of this current study modified Richardson's version of the questionnaire for their target sample, recent hospitality graduates and hiring managers of hospitality graduates. Modifications from Richardson's questionnaire included: the expectations were converted to experiences, the term job was converted to career, and the scale was converted from a three-point scale to an eight- and a seven-point scale to increase the variance in responses. The importance scale was from 1 (not important) to 7 (very important) and 8 being "Critical," meaning if the item was not present they would leave the industry. The experience scale was from 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely). These questionnaires were administered in a web-based format and suggestions from Park and Khan (2006) and Dillman (2007) were used. Links to the survey, hosted on SurveyMonkey®, were emailed to participants either by the researchers or by the contact at participating universities.

The three questionnaires (one for graduates still in the industry, one for graduates no longer in the industry, and one for hiring managers) had similar wording, with each modified to fit the target sample. Within each questionnaire there was a section rating importance of career factors and experience of career factors.

3.2.1 Hospitality management graduate questionnaires

The hospitality graduate questionnaire included demographic questions, one of which asked the respondents for their current employment status with respect to the hospitality industry. Those within the hospitality industry were directed to one questionnaire; those that had left were directed to a similar questionnaire adapted to match their current work status. The questionnaire was used to measure what graduates experienced in the industry as well as how important they perceived each of the career factors. The respondents who left the hospitality industry were asked to rate the career factors based on their previous experiences in the hospitality industry.

3.2.2 Hiring manager questionnaire

A similar questionnaire, directed towards the hiring managers, assessed perceptions of the same 20 career factors. This questionnaire was used to quantify the hiring managers' perceptions of what potential applicants want in a career (compared with career factor importance of graduates) and what the company offers (compared with career factor experiences of graduates).

3.2.3 Pilot testing

The modified questionnaires were pilot tested to detect problems with understandability and wording of the survey as recommended by Dillman (2007). The pilot test group consisted of 44 students who had recently completed a senior level human resources course and five faculty at one university. The pilot testers were asked to complete the questionnaire as well as provide

feedback regarding understandability. After analysis of the pilot test data, a few minor modifications were made with the formatting of the questionnaire, including a change of format for some directions, a redesigned webpage, and addition of a progress tracking mechanism.

2.3 Data analysis

All quantitative analyses were completed using SPSS Version 19.0 (2010) including descriptive statistics and multivariate comparison of means. To determine if significant differences existed between individuals who were still in the hospitality industry versus those that left the hospitality industry, a multivariate comparison of means was used. The test statistic that was used was Hotelling's Trace; a significant Hotelling's Trace means there are differences between the two groups of individuals (Hotelling, 1931).

Because the Hotelling's Trace was significant, there was justification for examining individual differences within the 20 items. Using multivariate analysis, the researchers examined the F-value for each individual item to determine which were significantly different. In order to determine which group of individuals rated each item higher, the researchers examined the mean differences of each item with a significant F-value. The researchers recognize an increase in the number of tests performed leads to an increase in the possibility of a false-positive result. However, these results are to be treated as an exploration and not rigorous statistical significance. The researchers used graphs to explore differences in perceptions of career factor importance and career factor experience of hospitality graduates relative to whether or not they were still in the hospitality industry.

Hospitality graduates were reluctant to provide contact information for their hiring managers. Due to the low response of the hiring managers ($n = 5$), only descriptive statistics were analyzed and compared to those of the hospitality graduates.

4. Results and discussion

There were 10 program or department heads of the 121 programs initially contacted who agreed to send the survey link to alumni, or provide alumni contact information to the researchers. Of those that did not agree, there were 12 that stated they could not participate because they did not have a database available, were currently contacting their alumni for other reasons and did not want to jeopardize their response rate, or stated it was against university policy. The remaining 99 program heads did not respond to the initial email. This lack of response indicates the difficulty in obtaining commitments to participate in research from program or department heads, correct contact information from program websites, and access to transmit electronic questionnaires despite spam filters.

Of the 10 programs or departments that participated in the survey, 3 had 30 or more respondents and the remaining 7 had less than 10 respondents each. There were a total of 165 usable questionnaires, of which 117 were still in a hospitality related industry and 48 were not. In all but one program or department, the contact information was not provided directly to the researchers so the overall response rate is unknown.

Of the 117 hospitality graduates still in the hospitality industry that completed the survey, 10 provided contact information for their hiring managers. Of those not in the industry, none provided the information for the person responsible for hiring them when they were in the industry. The hiring manager questionnaire was sent to all 10 of the hiring managers and 5 responded (50% response).

4.1 Demographic information

4.1.1 Hospitality graduates

The average age for hospitality graduates still in the industry was 31.5 years ($SD = 9.1$) and for those that had left the industry it was 31.3 years old ($SD = 5.4$). Hospitality graduate gender breakdowns were similar for both groups, with 61% of those still in the hospitality industry were females and 60% of those who left were female.

For respondents who stayed in the hospitality industry, the average tenure with their current employer was 4.4 years ($SD = 5.1$) with a range from 1 month to 21 years. In addition, those that stayed in the hospitality industry had been in the industry for 10.6 years ($SD = 7.6$) on average, with a minimum of 1 month to a maximum of 36 years. Because these questionnaires were intended for graduates from the last 10 years, this indicates many individuals went back to school while working in the hospitality industry or had been working in the industry during school. In their study, Walsh and Taylor (2007) found the average tenure at a specific hospitality organization was 3.8 years and at a specific job was 2.6 years; the participants in this current study had longer tenure.

For respondents who had left the hospitality industry, the average number of years they were in the hospitality industry was 4.9 ($SD = 5.2$). This is different from those still in the industry by more than 5 years, which could indicate individuals who decide to leave the industry will do so within the first 5-10 years. Blomme (2006) found hospitality management graduates tended to leave within the first 6 years which is consistent with these findings.

4.1.2 Hiring managers

The findings from the hiring managers are presented as a start to examining the perceptions. However, it is acknowledged that the sample is not representative due to the small sample size. The five respondents ranged in age from 33 years to 45 years old. In addition, four were male and one was female. Tenure at their current job ranged from 8 months to 15 years

with a 7.3 year average ($SD = 6.0$); this is 3 years longer than the hospitality management graduates still in the hospitality industry. The hiring managers' tenures in the hospitality industry ranged from 5 years to 21 years with a 14.8 year average ($SD = 5.9$) which is 4.2 years longer than the hospitality management graduates still in the hospitality industry. Two hiring managers had a bachelor's degree in hospitality management, one in psychology, one in general business, and one had a Master of Business Administration degree.

4.2 Research objective one

Research objective one was to explore differences between career factor importance and career factor experience of recent hospitality graduates with regard to those who stayed in the hospitality industry and those who left the hospitality industry. The Hotelling's Trace for the importance and experience factors were 0.352 ($p = .001$) and 0.423 ($p = .000$) respectively. These statistics indicate there is a difference in perceptions of the importance and experience factors when comparing those still in the hospitality industry with those who left (Hotelling, 1931). All hospitality graduates are included in the exploration of career factors. Career factor importance was rated on a 1-8 scale (1 = not important, 4 = neutral, 7 = very important, 8 = critical). With the exception of "opportunity to travel abroad," the majority of respondents rated the importance of each factor as neutral to very important or critical. The responses were similar for the experience items; however a few had noticeable differences, including: "good promotion prospects," "contributing to society," "easily combined with parenthood," "having a good starting salary," and "ability to care for others."

Table 1 includes the means of each of the career factors based on importance and experience for hospitality graduates in the hospitality industry. The two highest importance ratings were a career that the respondent "found enjoyable" (mean = 7.19; $SD = 0.72$) and a

career with “a pleasant work environment” (mean = 6.76; *SD* = 0.74), both of which are intrinsic motivators based on Ryan and Deci’s (2000) definitions. The next highest factors were a career that “has good promotion prospects” (mean = 6.63; *SD* = 1.09), “which gives me responsibility” (mean = 6.62; *SD* = 0.98), and “with colleagues that I can get along with” (mean = 6.57; *SD* = 1.07). These ratings are similar to the findings of Richardson (2009) who studied current hospitality and tourism students. Therefore, it appears current hospitality students and hospitality graduates both value similar career factors.

Richardson (2010) found the most important factors for hospitality and tourism students were to have an enjoyable job with a pleasant working environment. Richardson found both domestic and international students perceived “a job that is enjoyable,” an intrinsic motivator, as the most important factor that would influence their job decision. In addition, hospitality and tourism students perceived high pay, a secure job, and a job with colleagues they get along with, to be important. Good promotion prospects and a job with responsibilities are the two areas from the current research study that are not in the top five for Richardson’s work. Good promotion prospects was the sixth highest rated in Richardson’s study, but responsibility was tenth, perhaps indicating students do not find it important to have responsibilities, but once they graduate they realize the importance. Of the top five highest rated, the largest difference in mean score was between the first and second item, which suggests having a job that is enjoyable and with colleagues they can get along with is most important to these respondents, both of which are intrinsic motivators.

[Insert Table 1 here]

For those hospitality graduates still in the hospitality industry, the highest rated career factor experienced was a career “which gives me responsibility” (mean = 6.20; *SD* = 1.09). The

next highest were a career “with colleagues that I get along with” (mean = 6.03; *SD* = 1.04), “where I can use my degree” (mean = 5.97; *SD* = 1.37), “that I find enjoyable” (mean = 5.81; *SD* = 1.29), and “with a pleasant working environment” (mean = 5.77; *SD* = 1.22). Based on these responses, it appears the respondents work with people they get along with, have responsibilities, and are using their hospitality degrees. Richardson (2009) found the most expected career factor to be career mobility, which was experienced by hospitality graduates in this study (mean = 5.38; *SD* = 1.38). In Richardson’s study, the next highest rated career factor expected by the hospitality students was a job that gives me responsibility. In the present study, responsibility had the highest experience rating, so it seems students have realistic expectations in this area.

The lowest rated career factors for experience included having a career “with the opportunity to travel” (mean = 3.40; *SD* = 2.17) and “that can be easily combined with parenthood” (mean = 4.14; *SD* = 1.75). Because importance on opportunity to travel is also low (mean = 3.72; *SD* = 1.98) it may not be of concern that graduates were not experiencing travel. The standard deviations for the lower items are noticeably higher; this may indicate a higher variability in offerings of these career factors. However, importance for a career that could easily be combined with parenthood was rated higher (mean = 5.30; *SD* = 2.09) and therefore the difference between the experience and importance could become an issue. Richardson (2009) found hospitality and tourism students expected combining the job with parenthood to be difficult. The expectation of the hospitality students extend to the experiences of the hospitality graduates of the current study. However, hospitality students had an expectation for travel opportunities, which is not currently being experienced by the hospitality graduates. Perhaps the current economic state and the advancements in technology (e.g. conducting virtual meetings) have reduced the need for travel. Dougherty (2009) found one of the primary cost reductions to

budget shortfalls in public administration was limiting travel; similar cost reduction strategies occur in the private sector as well. In addition, Richardson's (2009) work included tourism students who may have had a higher expectation of travel.

Table 2 includes the means of the importance and experience for the career factors of hospitality graduates no longer in the hospitality industry. There are no comparable studies for these data, so they were compared to the hospitality graduates still in the industry. For those no longer in the industry, the most important factor is the same as for those still in the hospitality industry, having a career "that they find enjoyable" (mean = 7.14; *SD* = 1.00), an intrinsic motivator. In addition, the next highest rated items were having a career "which gives me responsibility" (mean = 6.70; *SD* = 0.86), "that provides an intellectual challenge" (mean = 6.67; *SD* = 0.94), "with colleagues that I can get along with" (mean = 6.65; *SD* = 0.97), and "with a pleasant working environment" (mean = 6.65, *SD* = 1.00), all of which are intrinsic motivators. Having a career "with good promotion prospects," an extrinsic motivator, was in the top five for those in the hospitality industry, but it is not in the top five for those not in the industry. Having a career "that provides an intellectual challenge" is in the top five for those that have left the hospitality industry, but not in the top five for those still in the hospitality industry. Maxwell et al. (2010) found Generation Y hospitality students want a career that is challenging and lack engagement when the challenge is not present, therefore, possibly giving hints to why those that left did so.

[Insert Table 2 here]

The hospitality graduates who left the hospitality industry were asked to rate the experience of their career when they were in the hospitality industry, and the mean ratings are found in Table 2. The highest rated factor was having a career "which gives me responsibility"

(mean = 5.40; *SD* = 1.33). The next highest were a career “with colleagues that I can get along with” (mean = 5.30; *SD* = 1.32), “where I can use my degree” (mean = 5.07; *SD* = 1.67), “where I gain transferable skills” (mean = 4.98; *SD* = 1.39), and “that I find enjoyable” (mean = 4.73; *SD* = 1.69). The lowest rated experience items were having a career “with the opportunity to travel abroad” (mean = 2.81; *SD* = 1.83), “that has a good starting salary” (mean = 3.29; *SD* = 1.67), and “that can be easily combined with parenthood” (mean = 3.33; *SD* = 1.87). These findings indicate hospitality graduates that left the industry were experiencing high levels of responsibility and use of their degrees, but did not have a good starting salary or work-life balance.

Because the Hotelling’s Trace values were significant, the researchers were justified in examining individual differences among the career factors by using F-values for each individual item (Hotelling, 1931). Table 3 contains the F-value and the corresponding p-value for each of the 20 career factor comparisons. For career factor importance, the items that differed between those still in the industry and those that left included a career: “that has good promotion prospects,” “where I contribute to society,” and “where I can use my degree.” For career factor experience, all but the following were found to be significantly different, a career: “where I contribute to society,” “that has a reasonable workload,” “with the opportunity to travel abroad,” and “where I can care for others.” The items that were found to be significantly different in the multivariate tests were examined more closely for individual differences.

[Insert Table 3 here]

4.2.1 Importance

The items that were found to be significantly different ($p < .05$) were rated higher by those that stayed in the hospitality industry compared to those that left the hospitality industry. A

career “that has good promotion prospects” and “where I can use my degree” were both rated higher by those that stayed in the hospitality industry. A career “where I contribute to society” was rated higher by those that had left the industry in importance.

These findings would indicate those still in the hospitality industry find it more important to have good promotion prospects, an extrinsic motivator, and a career in which they can use their hospitality degree, an intrinsic motivator. All respondents had a hospitality degree and so this finding would either indicate those that left do not mind having a career in which their hospitality degree is not used or perhaps those still in the industry are there because they feel it is important to be in the industry that is consistent with their studies. In addition, those that stayed in the hospitality industry indicate it is more important to be promoted. This could indicate they believe staying in the hospitality industry is the best method of getting promoted, perhaps due to their hospitality degree. However, those that left found it more important to contribute to society; perhaps they did not envision they could accomplish this in the hospitality industry.

4.2.2 Experience

Every item that was found to be significantly different in the multivariate test were rated higher by those who stayed in the hospitality industry rating compared to those who left. In addition, all 20 items were rated higher on career factor experience for hospitality graduates still in the industry. This could indicate hospitality graduates in the industry perceive they experienced more of all of the career factors than those that left the hospitality industry did while they were in the hospitality industry. However, the hospitality graduates who had left the industry may have an overall negative image of the industry and thus rated all areas lower.

4.2.3 Importance and experience

The two career factors that were significantly different for both career factor importance and experience were a career “that has good promotion prospects” and “where I can use my degree.” Both of these items were perceived as more important and experienced more by those in the hospitality industry. This would indicate these are two career factors that match up; if a hospitality graduate, who is still in the industry, found them important they also perceived they had experienced them.

4.3 Research objective two

There were ten hospitality management graduates who provided contact information for their hiring manager. Of these ten, there were five hiring managers that responded to the survey. Due to the small number of responses, only an examination of descriptive statistics are examined and presented in Table 4.

[Insert Table 4 here]

4.3.1 Importance

A graph of the mean scores for importance from the hiring managers and both hospitality graduates who left and who stayed in the hospitality industry can be found in Figure 1. Having a career “that is enjoyable” was the career factor that hiring managers perceived as the most important to a potential applicant for a position within their organization. For both sets of hospitality graduates, having a career “that was enjoyable” was also rated the most important, this shows a consistency across all three groups of respondents. Richardson’s (2009) study of hospitality and tourism students will be used as a comparison to graduates and managers in this study as the questionnaire used was very similar and it is the most relevant study. Richardson combined hospitality and tourism students into one group and therefore they were considered

together for these comparisons. The hospitality and tourism students in Richardson's (2009) study found an enjoyable job to be the most important career factor.

There were five career factors that were rated lower by the hiring manager than both sets of hospitality graduates, these were a career: "with colleagues that I can get along with," "that provides an intellectual challenge," "where I will contribute to society," "that has a reasonable workload," and "where I can care for others." These findings indicate a hiring manager does not believe an applicant perceives these career factors at the same level of importance as the hospitality graduates. However, Richardson (2009) found "where I can care for others" as the lowest rated item and "where I will contribute to society" and "that provides an intellectual challenge" as relatively low for hospitality and tourism students for career factor importance. Blomme et al. (2009) suggested hospitality students' expectations change after they enter the industry. This is supported by comparing this current research study with Richardson's because hospitality and tourism students' perceived career factor importance does not match hospitality graduates' perceived importance. However, it does seem there are closer matches between hiring managers' perceptions and hospitality and tourism students' perceptions.

4.3.2 Experience

A graph of mean scores for the extent of which the hiring manager's organization offers each of the 20 career factors paired with the experiences of the hospitality graduates can be found in Figure 2. With the exception of a career "where I can use my degree" and "where I gain transferable skills," the hiring managers rated each item higher than the hospitality graduates. While the scales were the same, the managers and graduates were rating different items, extent to which the organization offers as opposed to actual experience, which could explain the differences. However, the hiring managers' ratings are more similar to those of the individuals

that are still in the hospitality industry. This congruency offers some evidence that the two views are similar.

A career “that is respected,” “with career mobility,” and “with a good starting salary” were the three factors that had the largest discrepancies between hiring managers and those still in the hospitality industry. This indicates the hiring managers believe the career they offer is more respected, allows for more movement between careers, and has a better starting salary than hospitality graduates experienced. Richardson (2009) found hospitality and tourism students expected their jobs in hospitality to have high career mobility, agreeing with the hiring managers’ results in this study. However, the hospitality students did not expect a high starting salary or a job that was well respected. It seems the perceptions of hiring managers are different from both sets of hospitality graduates as well as hospitality students on these factors.

4.3.3 Hiring managers’ difference in perception

In most cases, the perceived offerings (experience ratings) were greater than the importance ratings; therefore, the hiring managers believed the organizations were providing career factors even when these career factors may not be important to applicants. Differences can be seen in a career “that I find enjoyable,” “with colleagues I enjoy,” “that has good promotion prospects,” “where I can use my degree,” “that has a reasonable workload,” “with high quality resources and equipment,” “with career mobility,” “that can easily be combined with parenthood,” “that has a good starting salary,” “where I can care for others,” and “that offers opportunities for further training.” For all of these career factors, there is a larger difference in experience and importance ratings for both hospitality graduates still in the hospitality industry and those who left the hospitality industry. This indicates hiring managers believe the difference between what is experienced and what is important is smaller than those in the job perceive. It is

important that hiring managers focus on closing the gap, especially with those career factors that overlap with being most important to hospitality graduates, in order to hire and retain hospitality graduates at their organizations.

5. Conclusions

The researchers found 29.1% of the recent, participating, graduates from hospitality programs or departments had already left the hospitality industry. This is lower than has been found in some past research where those who left ranged from 48% (King, McKercher, & Waryszak, 2003) to 70% (Blomme, 2006). However, this finding aligns with Lu and Adler's (2008) finding that 32% of hospitality graduates intended to leave the hospitality industry. Perhaps the lower percentage of hospitality graduates that had left the industry was due to the state of the U.S. economy and high unemployment rate during the research period. Perhaps some of the career factors that were found to be lacking by individuals who left the hospitality industry, such as better compensation and hours, were not readily available given the economic conditions at the time.

There are differences between hospitality graduates experiences and what they perceived to be important when selecting a career. These perceptions are different for those who were still in the hospitality industry and those that had left the hospitality industry. It is not surprising to find differences in the career factor experience and importance ratings, as Blomme et al. (2009) and Richardson (2009) found students' expectations of the hospitality and tourism industries change significantly once they enter the industry.

Richardson's (2009) findings and the results of this research study both indicate a job or career that the respondents find enjoyable is the most important factor. However, the experiences of the hospitality graduates and the expectations of the hospitality tourism students (Richardson,

2009) are lower than their importance ratings. Ryan and Deci (2000) identified intrinsic motivation as “doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable.” A career “that I find enjoyable” is going to mean something different to each individual and being an intrinsic motivator could make it difficult for hospitality managers and organizations to provide. However, it is important to ensure hiring managers realize the importance of an enjoyable career to hospitality graduates so they can make an effort to develop a culture of enjoyment in the organization. In addition, hospitality graduates need to manage their expectations and realize initially the career may not be as enjoyable as they deem important.

The hospitality graduates from this research study did not find it as important to have a high starting salary as they did to have high earnings over the length of the career. Neither hospitality graduates who stayed, or left, perceived they had a high starting salary or high earnings over the length of the career. The hiring managers seemed to slightly agree, but the magnitude of the gap was not as high. Hospitality and tourism students did not have expectations for a high starting salary, but expected to have high earnings over the length of their career as indicated by Richardson’s (2009) work; the current study indicates the same is true of graduates who have been out of college one to ten years. While increasing compensation for all hospitality employees is not a feasible option, hiring managers should discuss succession planning with recent hospitality graduates thereby addressing this important career factor. Kim et al. (2009) found as employees progressed professionally, salary becomes the most valued factor. The hospitality graduates in the current study had only been out of college for 0-10 years and perhaps had not made it to that point in their career yet and could explain why they may be more intrinsically motivated.

The hiring managers in the current study perceived the organizations they work for provided an intellectual challenge and training opportunities to their employees. However, the findings indicate there is a gap between what the hospitality graduates are experiencing and the importance of the intellectual challenge and training opportunities provided. Walsh and Taylor (2007) noted that educated employees are the most difficult to retain. The authors provided the rationale that educated employees were not being challenged or offered development opportunities. Maxwell et al. (2010) found Generation Y hospitality students needed a challenging job to be engaged and suggested development programs as a method of retaining these students as employees. The findings of this current study indicate the perceptions of the hiring managers may be the cause. If hiring managers believe the need is met, they may not strive to increase the challenges and training opportunities. Changing the perception of the hiring managers so they know their educated employees want more challenges and training opportunities could decrease the gap differential and increase retention.

Robinson et al. (2008) found graduates had an unrealistic vision of what their career path would be upon graduation. Richardson (2008) found hospitality and tourism students who experience the hospitality and tourism industries, such as through an internship, are less likely to enter their respective industries. While decreasing the amount of graduates who want to enter the industry is not a desired outcome, ensuring students have accurate expectations is important. Perhaps requiring immediate internships, even as a line level employee, of hospitality students could help. The hospitality graduates who stayed in the industry indicated they continued to remain in the industry due to the experiences, challenges, enjoyment, and to use their degrees. If the graduates want the experiences and challenges, requiring more internships may be a valid solution. In addition, Hinkin and Tracey (2010) argued industry practitioners need to better

manage their human capital. By providing the experiences and challenges the hospitality graduates want, perhaps the industry would be better able to retain educated staff.

If students are required to receive real-life hospitality industry experience early in their educational studies, educators will be able to shape a more realistic picture of the industry. Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000) suggested hospitality graduates with more realistic expectations are more likely to remain in the industry; this idea was further supported by Chuang et al. (2007). If educators are able to shape expectations to be more realistic, perhaps hospitality graduates would have longer tenure. The caveat to this argument is that it could cause a decrease in the number of hospitality students, an undesirable outcome. However, Marchante et al. (2007) found experience can make up for education, but not vice versa, and perhaps convincing hospitality students of the importance and value of hospitality experience would ensure they were motivated to do well and participate in as many hospitality industry related experiences as possible.

While internships will give the students the experiences they need, there are only a certain number of jobs they can experience. Kim et al. (2010) argued having specific topic based courses, such as event management, club management, or casino management, would allow students to get a more rounded education and be able to experience segments of the hospitality industry they do not experience during their internships. Kim et al. also argued educators need to continue asking the industry, as well as students, what is important to them so that curricula can be changed and be as dynamic as the hospitality industry. Perhaps with a balance between diverse internship experiences and career specific courses, students will be adequately prepared to enter the hospitality industry with more accurate expectations.

The consequences of implementing early internships and setting realistic expectations cannot be ignored. Relevant parties, educators and educational institutions, may be impacted in

the following ways: increase in resources needed to manage/supervise early internship programs, decreased enrollment in courses while students away at internships, and potential for loss of students in hospitality majors after expectations are understood and if found not to align with student's own expectations.

There were inadequate responses to the hiring manager survey to make any statistical conclusions. However, based on this small sample, there were differences in what employers perceived their new employees will find important and what they actually find important. In order to create a better fit between importance and experiences, perhaps industry practitioners should allow for slight modifications to a job tasks and duties based on the individual hired. It is clear hospitality graduates want to succeed, but in order to do so employers may need to adjust their expectations and offer new challenges to keep employees interested. This is supported by Hinkin and Tracey (2010), who found human resource management in the hospitality industry to be lagging behind other similar industries. Hinkin and Tracey noted hospitality organizations are becoming more innovative in the use of technology and revenue management, but are lacking innovation in managing people.

5.1. Potential contributions

There are practical and theoretical contributions of this research study. This research was designed to fill a gap in current research, determining what former hospitality management students are experiencing and which career factors they find important. Once this is answered, the information can be used to provide current students with a more accurate educational and work-place experience. The important factors for hospitality graduates in selecting a career could be used by hospitality managers or management companies to shape the workplace. While some may be more difficult to control, a job that is enjoyable, others are easier to implement, a job that

challenges the hospitality graduates. The findings of this research will be valuable in the future for investigating the gap between industry and education. Educators could use this information to inform students about what their employees will be looking for in the future. Researchers could use this information to continue to examine what is important for hospitality students, graduates, and employees in order to improve the workforce.

5.2. Limitations of Study

While the intent of this research study was to reach hospitality graduates from programs or departments all across the nation, only 10 of the 121 program or department heads agreed to participate. In addition, only 3 of the programs or departments had more than five respondents. Due to the low level of nation-wide participation and number of respondents, the results from this research study are not generalizable. In addition, attempting to contact program or department heads may not be the best method for obtaining a commitment to participate. A few of the program or department heads who responded directed the researcher to an individual responsible for managing alumni relations within their programs or departments. It is reasonable to assume this may be the case for many other programs or departments and these contacts would prove more productive for recruitment purposes

The results and discussion related to hiring managers should be used with caution. The low sample size ($n = 5$) limits how representativeness of the data collected. While data of interest were presented, it is acknowledged the findings are not generalizable. In addition, the main focus was to examine differences between hospitality graduates who stayed in the hospitality industry and those who left the hospitality industry. Additional analysis and discussion were provided on each item found to be significant on its own. Those using this data should recognize as number of tests increase, so does the chance for a Type I error, or a false significant finding.

The respondents that left the industry were asked to report their experiences when they were working in the hospitality industry. These individuals may have experienced a change in their perceptions about the hospitality industry since leaving it; either a more positive or more negative view may have resulted.

5.3. Recommendations for future research

Regarding methods, in order to increase responses when attempting to use alumni as a sample, future researchers should locate contact information for alumni relations personnel within hospitality programs or departments. If unavailable, perhaps shortening the length of the initial email to program or department heads to reduce the time required to respond could help in ensuring response.

Suggestions for specific future research to further advance this area of study include examining what hospitality managers and organizations are doing to address career factors in the workplace. For example, future researchers should survey a larger, and more representative, sample of hospitality managers. In addition, increasing the number of participants would help reduce the likelihood of a Type I error when examining single items. The mechanisms, policies, or procedures present in a work place help to establish the culture of the organization thereby potentially promoting or discouraging various career factors. In addition, researchers should examine what educators are doing to prepare students to enter the workplace and how realistic expectations are conveyed. Many hospitality programs or departments require internships and/or work experiences as part of the curriculum; what overall impact do these have on career factor importance and overall retention rates would be important to study. Likewise, there is a need to study the impact of length and/or number of experiences during undergraduate programs and the affect these have on career importance and overall retention.

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