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Abstract

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Keywords

Employees, hotel, performance, supervision, transformational leadership

Disciplines

Business Administration, Management, and Operations | Hospitality Administration and Management | Organizational Behavior and Theory

Comments

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ABSTRACT. This study examined front desk supervisors' transformational leadership dimensions and employees' performance. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Avolio & Bass, 2004) and a researcher developed performance questionnaire were used. Employees from 34 hotels (83% response) in one Midwestern state participated in the study. Results indicated that front desk employees perceived their supervisors exhibited leadership dimensions of inspirational motivation and idealized influence more frequently and individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation less frequently. Front desk supervisors reported the most frequently exhibited performance areas as positive attitude, safety/care of equipment and attendance/punctuality. Least frequently exhibited performance areas were judgment and initiative/motivation. No significant relationship was found between supervisors' transformational leadership dimensions and employees' performance. Implications and suggestions for future research are discussed.

KEYWORDS. Employees, hotel, performance, supervision, transformational leadership

INTRODUCTION

The study of leadership and leaders' behaviors has been documented in books, academic papers, and the popular press. Leadership has been categorized by styles, traits, characteristics, and behaviors (Gregoire & Arendt, 2004). Popular leadership theories abound including those of servant leadership, relational leadership, and transformational leadership (Gregoire & Arendt, 2004).

The benefits of leadership and leaders' behaviors are noteworthy and evidenced by the application of popular leadership approaches and theories. Certain leadership behaviors have been linked to the financial performance of organizations; companies with leaders possessing certain leadership behaviors had better long-term financial performance (Roi, 2006). Leadership has been linked with productivity and motivation (DuBrin, 2008). Likewise, the positive connection between supervisors' leadership behaviors and employees' performance has been reported and this will be discussed further and applied in this paper.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is one popular leadership theory receiving attention over recent years. Bass (1985) defined transformational leadership as the leader's ability to motivate followers to perform beyond what he/she would normally expect. There are four dimensions of transformational leadership including: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Idealized influence is exhibited when followers respect and trust their leaders and want to be like them. Inspirational motivation is exhibited when a leader acts in a way that causes people around him/her to be motivated to work better by instilling a sense of meaning in the work. Individualized consideration is shown when a leader gives attention to each employee and is concerned with his/her individual needs; also, the leader is generally seen as a

coach or a mentor. Intellectual stimulation is demonstrated when a leader asks questions to try to increase productivity and innovation (Avolio & Bass, 2004). The most frequently used tool to measure transformational leadership behaviors is the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Avolio & Bass, 2004). This instrument contains 20 statements related to transformational leadership behaviors.

Performance

Researchers have approached evaluating performance differently. Some have used self evaluations and a supervisor's rating whereby the employee rates his/her performance and a supervisor or manager rates the employee's performance simultaneously. An example of this can be found in Patiar and Lokman's (2008) work where they found subordinates (departmental managers in this case) self rated their performance higher than did their managers (general managers in this case). Other researchers have measured performance through supervisors' perspectives only and therefore no comparisons of performance could be made (Iun & Huang, 2007). Still others have based performance on customers' perceptions of performance. Hartline and Jones (1996) studied front desk staff and room service employees in this manner and found linkages between employee performance, overall perceived value, and overall hotel quality ratings.

The performance appraisal is one way to evaluate employee performance in hotel operations. Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, and Wright (2007) suggested linking performance appraisal criteria to desired employee attributes or behaviors. Welbourne, Johnson, and Erez (1998) emphasized simplicity in performance appraisals as one supervisor may have to rate many employees. Therefore, the questionnaire used for this study included 10 statements specific to front desk employees performance criteria such as knowledge, skills and abilities. These knowledge, skills and abilities aligned with the typical job description for a front desk employee knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Transformational Leadership and Performance

Leaders possessing transformational leadership behaviors have been shown to have better performance outcomes in terms of overall organizational performance, task performance, and followers' performance. This leadership and performance connection has been studied in many areas including: military (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003; Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002), service and manufacturing organizations (Bono & Judge, 2003; Purvanova, Bono, & Dzieweczynski, 2006), acquisitions (Nemanich & Keller, 2007), task performance (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006) and education (Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang, & Chen, 2005). Overwhelmingly, findings from all studies supported transformational leadership behaviors as being beneficial to organizations, leaders, and followers.

Hospitality employers look for leadership skills in perspective supervisor and managers. Once hired, supervisors and managers are often encouraged to participate in leadership development training programs. However, if in fact supervisors with leadership behaviors impact employees' performance has received little attention in hospitality research.

Purpose and Research Objectives

The purpose of this study was to examine front desk employees' perceptions of front desk supervisors' transformational leadership behaviors and front desk supervisors' perceptions of employees' performance. Specific research objectives included:

1. determine which transformational leadership dimensions are exhibited most frequently by front desk supervisors,
2. determine if there is a difference in how front desk employees perceive supervisor leadership behavior frequency based on employee demographics,

3. determine which front desk employee performance areas are exhibited most frequently, and
4. assess if a significant relationship exists between front desk supervisors' leadership behaviors and employees' performance.

This study is important to both future researchers and practitioners as a step towards understanding employees' perceptions of leadership and employee performance.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants for this study included hotel front desk employees and their direct supervisors. Participation in this study was limited by location (within a 60-mile radius of a university in the Midwest) and size of hotel (25 rooms or more). Hotel location was limited due to methods used to distribute and collect questionnaires. Size of hotel was defined as it was assumed hotels with fewer than 25 rooms would not have at least three front desk employees to participate in the study. A comprehensive list of hotels was developed from the American Automobile Association TourBook (2007). There were 393 total hotels and of those 365 hotels (93%) met the size criterion and 100 hotels (25%) met the location criterion; 93 hotels (24%) met both criteria. All hotels selected were within the same state.

Research Instruments

Subordinate Questionnaire

There were two questionnaires used in this study. Three subordinates of each supervisor were

asked to complete the first questionnaire, the subordinate questionnaire. This questionnaire was completed by front desk employees and used to measure the transformational leadership behaviors of their direct supervisor. A modified version of the MLQ was used; this version contained statements about transformational leadership behaviors and left out statements on contingent reward, management-by-exception, and laissez-faire leadership behaviors. A modified version of the questionnaire has been used in past research, including hospitality research, and has been proven reliable and valid (Bass et al., 2003; Tracey & Hinkin, 1996; Walumba, Wange, Lawler, & Shi, 2004). The researchers obtained permission to use the MLQ for this current study. Demographic questions were also included in the subordinate questionnaire.

Supervisor Questionnaire

The supervisors completed the second questionnaire, the supervisor questionnaire, which was used to measure subordinate performance. The supervisor was defined as the person to whom the front desk employee directly reported. The supervisor was given four questionnaires and asked to complete at least three – one for each employee supervised.

Due to the lack of valid and reliable tools for measuring front desk employee performance, the supervisor questionnaire was developed using a front desk employee performance appraisal form as a guide. Permission for use of the performance appraisal was obtained from the hospitality management company where the form was being used at 36 hotels in the Midwest. The performance tool contained 10 questions rating the following employee performance criteria: attitude toward guest, safety/care of equipment, attitude toward supervision, attendance/punctuality, attitude toward work/co-workers, dependability, quality of work, job knowledge and skills, judgment, and initiative/motivation. Demographic questions about the supervisor as well as demographic questions about each employee were asked.

Pilot Test

The questionnaires were reviewed by three experts for construct and content validity and then pilot tested with 28 future hospitality managers. The researchers used methods recommended by Salant and Dillman (1994) to pilot test both questionnaires. Minor changes were made following pilot testing.

Procedures

The researchers called the general manager at all 93 hotels meeting size and location criteria. After receiving commitment to participate, the researchers set a date to hand deliver the questionnaires so that the general manager would be there. A researcher instructed the supervisors on how to randomly select subordinates to participate in this study. The subordinates completed the subordinate questionnaire and the direct supervisor of those subordinates completed the supervisor questionnaire. A researcher returned to the property, approximately one week after delivery, to collect completed questionnaires.

Data Analysis

SPSS Version 15.0 (2006) was used for all data analysis. Data coding and entry were done following the recommendations of Salant and Dillman (1994). The researchers used ANOVA to examine if transformational leadership behaviors differed based on demographic characteristics (age, length of time with supervisor, and size of hotel). The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to determine which dimensions of transformational leadership behaviors, as perceived by their subordinates, have high correlations. Any found to be highly correlated were

pooled for the remainder of analysis. Regression was used to determine which dimensions of transformational leadership behaviors had a significant relationship with employee performance. Standard deviations were looked at to determine the variability of responses among subordinates for the same supervisor.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There were 82 hotels that met all selection criteria. Hotel capacity ranged from 25 to 415, and distance from the home institution ranged from 1/2 to 60 miles. After calling, 11 of the 93 hotels were found not to have a least three front desk employees and therefore eliminated from the sample. The researchers contacted the general managers of the 82 hotels and 41 (50%) agreed to participate and received questionnaires. Staff at 34 hotels of the 41 hotels (83% response) completed the questionnaires. Each supervisor filled out an average of 3.47 questionnaires.

There were 136 supervisor questionnaires and 102 subordinate questionnaires distributed at the 34 hotels. A total of 118 supervisor (87% response) and 91 subordinate (89% response) questionnaires were collected. On average, 2.68 subordinates from each hotel completed the questionnaire. Demographic information for both subordinates and supervisors can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics of Supervisors (N = 34) and Subordinates (N = 91)

Characteristic	Supervisors		Subordinates	
	<i>n</i>	% ^a	<i>n</i>	% ^a
Age				
18 to 21 years	0	0	7	7.7
22 to 25 years	5	14.7	24	26.4
26 to 30 years	11	32.4	19	20.9
31 to 40 years	4	11.8	19	20.9
41 years or more	10	29.4	22	24.2
Shifts worked				
7am to 3pm	21	61.8	59	64.8
3pm to 11pm	16	47.1	50	54.9
11pm to 7am	9	26.5	23	25.3
Other	16	47.1	11	12.1

Time worked^b				
Less than 6 months	1	2.9	6	6.6
6 months to 1 year	6	17.6	32	35.2
1 to 2 years	5	14.7	18	19.8
2 to 3 years	5	14.7	7	7.7
3 to 4 years	0	0.0	5	5.5
4 years or more	13	38.2	23	25.3
Hours worked per week^b				
16 or less	0	0.0	5	5.5
17 to 24	0	0.0	43	47.3
25 to 32	0	0.0	16	17.6
33 to 40	7	20.6	10	11.0
41 to 50	16	47.1	8	8.8
50 or more	7	20.6	9	9.9
Time worked with rated individual^c				
Less than 6 months	25	21.2	24	26.4
6 months to 1 year	36	30.5	25	27.5
1 to 2 years	18	15.3	15	16.5
2 to 3 years	13	11.0	10	11.0
3 to 4 years	17	14.4	8	8.8
4 years or more	9	7.6	9	9.9

^aPercentages may not total 100% due to non-response or multiple responses to questions.

^bTime and hours worked refers to as a supervisor of front desk employees for supervisors and as a front desk employee for subordinates.

^cSupervisors rated 3-4 employees so $N = 118$ for this question for supervisors.

Transformational Leadership

Perceived transformational leadership behaviors of a supervisor were rated by his/her subordinates. Due to the copyright agreement, complete questionnaire statements could not be published so statement concepts are provided in Table 2. The rating scale for this questionnaire was 0 to 4 with 0 equivalent to “Not at all” and 4 equivalent to “Frequently, if not always.” Because some statements were unanswered, the number of responses ranged from 87 to 91.

TABLE 2. Mean Ratings and Reliability Estimates for Supervisors' Transformational Leadership Dimensions (N = 87-91)

Dimension ^a Statement Concept	α^b	Mean ^c	SD
Idealized Influence	0.88	3.07	0.73
Power and confidence		3.42	0.78
Good of hotel		3.38	0.83
Wants respect		3.21	1.00
Moral consequences		3.09	0.95
Pride		3.00	1.10
Sense of purpose		2.96	1.14
Sense of mission		2.96	0.98
Values and beliefs		2.48	1.12
Inspirational Motivation	0.89	3.11	0.82
Enthusiasm of goals		3.26	0.93
Confidence in goals		3.23	0.96
Optimism for the future		3.05	0.97
Vision of the future		2.87	0.96
Individualized Consideration	0.81	2.96	0.83
Treats employees as individuals		3.34	0.92
Recognizes different needs of employees		2.99	1.01
Develops strengths in employees		2.79	1.06
Teaching and coaching		2.73	1.16
Intellectual Stimulation	0.84	2.76	0.88
Offers differing perspectives		3.00	1.00
Employee looks at differing perspectives		2.86	0.98
New methods of completing tasks		2.79	1.12
Examines own beliefs		2.34	1.22

^aLeadership dimensions and statement concepts adapted from Avolio and Bass (2004)

^b Chronbach's alpha for the items within each dimension

^cScale for statements: 0=not at all 1=once in a while 2=sometimes 3=fairly often 4=frequently if not always

Transformational leadership consists of four dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The internal consistency reliability estimates (Cronbach's alpha), mean ratings, and standard deviations for the measures used in this study can be found in Table 2. The Cronbach's alpha for the dimensions of transformational leadership ranged from .81 to .89, indicating an acceptable range of reliability (Upton & Cook, 2002). These values are consistent with previous hospitality research using the MLQ; Tracey and Hinkin (1996) found the Cronbach's alphas to be from .88 to .91.

The mean ratings for each dimension ranged from the lowest for intellectual stimulation, 2.76 (SD = 0.88), to the highest for inspirational motivation, 3.11 (SD = 0.82). These mean ratings were

slightly lower than those in research done by Tracey and Hinkin (1996); their mean ratings ranged from 3.13 (SD = 0.79) for intellectual stimulation to 3.45 (SD = 0.89) for inspirational motivation. The leaders studied held upper-level management positions; perhaps the higher manager position, the higher the perceived transformational leadership behaviors.

The highest rated leadership statement overall was in the idealized influence dimension of transformational leadership. The statement rated the supervisor's sense of power and confidence and had a mean rating of 3.42 (SD = 0.78). Therefore employees reported they fairly often to frequently observed power and confidence in their supervisors. Exhibition of power and confidence may be more visible to employees compared to the other leadership behaviors measured. Power can lead to lower subordinate job stress (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2006); therefore showing this power to employees may help reduce employee stress. Training supervisors on how to exhibit this sense of power could be done in the workplace or through more formal educational programs, such as a hospitality management courses. Overall leadership concepts have be taught and practiced through role plays, group work, or in a lab where management roles are filled by students. Markulis, Jassawalla, and Sashittal (2006) found students wanted a chance to lead sometime during their undergraduate degree, with this eagerness to lead, students may be more willing to learn other leadership techniques. Arendt and Gregoire (2006) found that college students perceived team projects helpful in developing their leadership behaviors.

The researchers used ANOVA to determine if subordinates perceived transformational leadership behaviors of their supervisors differ based on demographics. None of the demographics tested were statistically significant, including: the subordinates' age, $F(4, 86) = 0.628, p = .644$; length of time working with the supervisor, $F(5, 85) = 0.918, p = .474$; or size of hotel, $F(3, 86) = 0.752, p = .524$. These findings indicate no difference in how employees perceive leadership behavior frequency based on their age, length of time working with the supervisor, or size of hotel.

Variability of Perceived Behaviors

Variability of perceived transformational leadership behaviors of supervisors as reported by subordinates was examined by using standard deviations. The standard deviations vary from 0.73 to 0.88; these numbers are comparable to the results from Tracey and Hinkin (1996). The standard deviations ranged between 0.79 and 0.98, which are slightly higher than the ones in this study. It appears as though the variability of perceived transformational leadership behaviors of supervisors, as reported by subordinates, in this study is relatively lower; however, there is still a high variability in the responses. With this high variability, it is necessary to sample multiple employees to get an accurate depiction of a supervisor's leadership behaviors.

Performance

The performance of a subordinate was rated by his/her direct supervisor; 118 questionnaires were analyzed to determine subordinates' performance. Upton and Cook (2002) defined reliability as a measure of the confidence one can have in a test. Cronbach's alpha approximates the reliability coefficient (Upton & Cook, 2002). Cronbach's alpha was calculated on the supervisor questionnaire, used to rate performance of subordinates. The Cronbach's alpha for all 10 performance statements was .81. A Cronbach's alpha of .81 is reasonably high and therefore it was concluded all statements were measuring the same construct. This questionnaire was developed for this research study so there were no directly comparable studies.

The mean ratings and standard deviations of each rated area can be found in Table 3. The rating scale for this questionnaire was 1 to 5 with 1 equivalent to "never" and 5 equivalent to "always." The highest rated areas were "Attitude toward guest" and "Safety/care of equipment," both with mean ratings of 4.48 (SDs = 0.75 and 0.71, respectively). The lowest rated area was "Initiative/motivation," with a mean rating of 3.98 (SD = 0.94). "Initiative/motivation" was the only area with a mean rating lower than 4. According to the supervisors sampled, on average, employees

displayed each of the rated areas most of the time or always, with the exception of “Initiative/motivation.”

Table 3. Supervisor Mean Ratings for Performance of Subordinates (N = 118)

Rating Area	Mean ^a	SD
Attitude toward guest	4.48	0.75
Safety/care of equipment	4.48	0.71
Attitude toward supervision	4.43	0.72
Attendance/punctuality	4.42	0.85
Attitude toward work/co-workers	4.32	0.82
Dependability	4.31	0.81
Quality of work	4.29	0.74
Job knowledge and skills	4.23	0.72
Judgment	4.07	0.78
Initiative/motivation	3.98	0.94

^aScale for statements: 1=never 2=rarely 3=sometimes 4=most of the time 5=always.

The “Initiative/motivation” area was rated lower than the other areas, meaning employees exhibited this less frequently as compared to the other areas. This lack of initiative or motivation could be related to the job itself. Front desk employees, inherently, may lack opportunities to display initiative or motivation. Many hotels, particularly chain hotels, have strict rules and procedures to follow when interacting with guests. Because the front desk staff interact with guests frequently, and may be restricted in how they do so, they may lack the opportunity to take the initiative or feel less motivated in the workplace.

This questionnaire is unique in that it is a reliable tool that measures performance of front desk employees. Having and using an accurate tool to measure performance and then addressing problems in performance where they arise would be beneficial to hotel managers.

Transformational Leadership and Performance

Correlations were calculated between each of the four dimensions of transformational leadership

behaviors. The correlations between all dimensions were high and significant at the .01 level; this is consistent with past research (Tracey & Hinkin, 1996). The Cronbach's alpha for the pooled dimensions was .96, this exceeds a common cutoff of .7 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). The high Cronbach's alpha indicates that within this sample all of the statements are measuring the same construct. All four dimensions were pooled for the remainder of analysis.

Regression was used with the transformational leadership behavioral score (measured using the MLQ) as the independent variable and overall perceived performance score (measured using the developed performance instrument) as the dependent variable. No significant relationship between these two variables was found, $F(1, 116) = 0.510, p = .477$. Researchers in other areas have found a relationship between transformational leadership behaviors and performance (Bass et al., 2003; Bono and Judge, 2003; Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Nemanich and Keller, 2007; Piccolo and Colquitt, 2006; Purvanova et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2005).

The lack of a relationship between transformational leadership behaviors and performance, in this study, may be due to many factors. Possible factors include: lack of consistency in ratings, fear of possible retaliation, bias in hotels, a lack of commitment, or no relationship exists. A plausible scenario might occur when the rating supervisor was the one who hired the employee. This hiring supervisor may be more lenient in the ratings because of a belief that he/she selected the best person for the job. This could lead to a "leniency error," meaning the supervisor may have given inaccurately high ratings to employees (Noe et al., 2007). Another error that may have caused inaccurate ratings could be "halo and horns." effect. The halo error refers to a supervisor rating an employee high in all areas based on doing well in one performance aspect; the horns error refers to the opposite (Noe et al., 2007). Perhaps an employee recently received a comment card from a guest praising a certain front desk employee; this may cause a supervisor to overrate the employee in all performance aspects, an example of recency error.

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Supervisors in this study who were rated higher in transformational leadership behaviors do not appear to supervise subordinates that perform better. No relationship was found between transformational leadership behaviors and performance in this study; however, several outcomes are notable.

A leader who exhibits idealized influence is characterized by having employees who respect and trust them (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Exhibiting power and confidence is part of the idealized influence dimension, which was the highest rated item. Power and confidence could be the most visible sign of transformational leadership of the areas rated. In addition, employees may be more familiar with supervisors exhibiting these behaviors so they may notice them more readily. Because power and confidence was perceived as the most visible sign of leadership, supervisors should focus on increasing how frequently they display power and confidence in their work in order to be perceived as a leader by their employees. In addition, the lowest rated concept within this dimension was the front desk supervisors' frequency in discussing values and beliefs. Ensuring employees understand a supervisor's values and beliefs could improve trust and respect from followers.

The researchers found high variability among subordinates' ratings for the same supervisor, thus multiple raters appear necessary to obtain a more representative leadership score. The researchers found that differences in demographic characteristics studied had no affect on leadership scores.

The personal touch added to the distribution and collection methods resulted in a high response rate. The researchers followed recommendations by Ravichandran and Arendt (2008). Contacting key figures, such as the general manager, prior to visiting or sending questionnaires is recommended.

The performance tool developed for this research was found to be reliable. The tool is customized

for front desk employees and addresses the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for this job.

Finally, the notion that power and confidence may be a quality subordinates equate with leadership in hotels requires additional research.

Limitations of Study

Because this study took place at hotels in a limited geographical area, the results may not be generalizable to other areas or other industries. Even though anonymity is assured to all participants, some may have felt uneasy about rating their direct supervisors and this may have caused errors in the results. The training of supervisors in rating the performance of their subordinates is unknown; therefore, rater errors may have affected the performance scores of subordinates.

Recommendations for Future Research

Researchers should follow similar methods used in this research study in order to increase response rates. The performance tool used in this study was found to be reliable; a similar tool should be used by future researchers when attempting to measure the performance of hotel front desk personnel.

Patiar and Lokman (2008) found differences in performance ratings, and Whitelaw and Morda (2004) found small differences in leadership behaviors, based on gender. Demographic questions regarding gender and ethnicity, both of which could have an effect on leadership or performance, could be added to allow exploration of differences in leadership behaviors by gender and ethnicity categories.

The relationship between transformational leadership behaviors and performance was not found to be significant in this study; however, that does not mean the relationship does not exist. Future

researchers in this area should look at educating employees about how to notice and accurately report supervisors' leadership behaviors. Hunter, Bedell-Avers, and Mumford (2007) report one common problem with leadership studies is that the raters, ones reporting the behavior, either have not witnessed the behavior or do not know how to record it on study questionnaires. Likewise, supervisors need to be educated so they can accurately rate the performance of their subordinates; this is one way to reduce rater errors (Noe et al., 2007). This includes training supervisors to prevent possible rater errors. Another possible way to reduce the error would be to try to calibrate how the supervisors rate subordinates, in order to make all ratings comparable. Calibration of how the supervisors rate would be a very extensive process, but something that could greatly increase the reliability of the results. One way to calibrate employee ratings would be to provide written descriptions of employees' behaviors and see how supervisors rated each employee. Next, supervisors could be coached when differences in ratings are noticed. Reminding supervisors to use the entire scale, not just the top half, could also lead to results that are more reliable.

There were high variances in responses from the raters for supervisor leadership behaviors; therefore future researchers should survey multiple raters per supervisor. Another option could be to have one rater per supervisor and have the supervisor fill out the self-rating form of the MLQ and compare the results to those of the subordinate.

Only half of the managers contacted agreed to participate in this study. This unwillingness points to makes it difficult to obtain input from industry representatives. In order to continue the advancement of hospitality knowledge, professionals in our industry need to be willing to participate in studies and more willing to take, or return, phone calls from researchers.

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