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Perceptions of the tourism and hospitality industry by Singapore polytechnic hospitality students: An exploratory study

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Perceptions of the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

by Singapore Polytechnic Hospitality Students

– An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

Perceptions of the Tourism and Hospitality Industry by Singapore Polytechnic

Hospitality Students – An Exploratory Study

by

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Many Singapore polytechnic students are not keen to join the hospitality line even after being enrolled in a 3-year hospitality program. Many students find the nature of the job too stressful and strenuous. Students have also cited reasons such as long working hours, shift work, dealing with unpredictable circumstances in the job environment and having lower starting remuneration as compared other industries (K. Ong, personal communications, June 16, 2010). Other perceived qualitative reasons that have been given by students for not joining the industry would be the semi-professional nature of the hospitality industry as compared to other industries such as education, law, engineering and business-related industries (Khan, 1992). Students especially from a semi-traditional Asian-Singapore context are not encouraged to join the hospitality line because their parents do not support their decision as the jobs in this industry is seen as one which is 'servitude' and have little prospects of promotion from rank-and-file. The polytechnics also play a major role in influencing the choice of career of their students through their faculty, curriculum, resources and links to the industry. Therefore Singapore hospitality schools would need to manage student expectations prior to and during the course of studies to encourage students to stay within the industry after graduation. Industrial practitioners must also re-look at their job

environment, practices, wages and welfare treatment of their staff so that they can retain and

grow human capital to prevent a dearth of manpower in the hospitality and tourism industry.

PART ONE

Introduction

The hospitality trade in Singapore has always enjoyed good performance over the last several years. According to the Singapore Hotel Industry Survey (2008), all hotels in Singapore enjoyed a significant increase in RevPAR of 30% from $170 to $222 in 2006. Although figures did drop 34.2% during the first quarter of 2009, Singapore properties have had an average compounded annual growth rate of 8.1% over the same period in 2008 (4Hoteliers, 2009).

Visitor arrivals have also been generally high. In 2007, Singapore saw a total of 10.3 million visitors (Singapore Hotel Industry Survey, 2008). In 2008 and 2009 respectively, visitor-ship remained significantly high at 10.1 million and 9.7 million respectively.

The number of hotels and number of hotel rooms have also steadily increased over the years. In 2007, the total number of hotels in Singapore was 226. By 2008, this number has increased to 243. The numbers of hotel rooms have also increased from 37,624 in 2007 to 39,376 in 2008 (Singapore Tourism Board, 2009). In 2009 and 2010, Singapore saw the opening of the two Integrated Resorts, with an additional 1350 room from Resorts World @ Sentosa and another 2,600 rooms from Marina Bay Sands. With this renaissance in the hospitality trade, it has been reported by Teo (2008), that 20,000 positions will be required to fill this increase in room inventory.

In view of this need, the Singapore Ministry of Education and the Economic Development Board requested the five local polytechnics to provide hospitality-related courses to fill this manpower vacuum back in 2004. The inception of these courses was in 2005. Currently, two batches of students from these programs have since graduated and obtained employment or gone on for further studies.

Despite the push by the polytechnics and the government and the ample job availability in the market, many students are shunning the industry, based on certain innate characteristics of the trade. Moreover, many Gen-Y (millennial) students have certain perceptions of the industry, from their upbringing and schooling. This study will look into these issues in more details and recommend strategies for the educational institutions, industry and ministries to retain students in the trade.

Purpose

According to Blomme (2006), many students who embark on a tourism and hospitality education trek do not join the trade, upon graduation. It is taken that students who enrol in a hospitality course will pursue a career in the tourism and hospitality industry immediately after graduation. The purpose of this paper is to look at the perceptions and attitudes of students that are joining the tourism and hospitality trade after graduating from a Singapore polytechnic. It seeks to understand the causes and factors that are attracting or repelling students from joining the tourism and hospitality trade.

Statement of Objective

The objective of this study is to evaluate and validate the reasons why polytechnic students are disinclined to join the tourism and hospitality industry. With the research presented, the tourism and hospitality companies will be able to address the concerns of their new-joiners. The Singapore Tourism Board, the Economic Development Board and the Ministry of Education will also be able take the necessary steps to reassess their curriculum and take proactive steps of streamlining candidates applying for hospitality courses.

Justification

From the research conducted by Blomme, Van Rheede & Tromp (2009), many students refrain from joining the hotel industry after graduation. It is further mentioned that up to 70% of staff leave the industry within the span of 6 years of joining the industry. Moreover,

Lo (2005) brought up the issue that many hospitality courses are not in sync with the needs of the industry, resulting in a mismatch in expectations from the students. Another issue that is prevalent in the industry is the constant changes in needs and content (Dopson & Tas, 2004). Singapore is facing a renaissance in the tourism and hospitality trade with the increase in room inventory and the opening of the Integrated Resorts. Therefore, schools might not be suitably aware of the current situation, having a curriculum that is outdated.

Constraints

This study takes a theoretical approach into understanding the psyche and expectations of tourism and hospitality students. No quantitative survey and study has been conducted during the course of this research. Research was conducted using personal communications from students, academia and secondary sources. Although valid, primary research would have led to greater robustness in data quality. Moreover, due to the confidentiality of data from other polytechnics, only one polytechnic was studied in detail.

Glossary of Terms

Employment and Employability Institute (e2i)

The Employment and Employability Institute (e2i) is an agency set up by the National Trade Union Council to provide job seekers with training opportunities and jobs. They provide employment coaching, career coaching and skills training. E2i acts a bridge between employers and prospective unemployed workers (e2i, 2010).

Institutes of Higher Learning

The Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) in Singapore are institutions that are providing tertiary education. These institutions do not fall under the category of the autonomous local universities, such as the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University and the Singapore Management University (Ministry of Education,

2010). These institutions can be both local and external foreign schools and can provide a range of academic offerings ranging from diplomas to doctorate degrees.

Polytechnics

Polytechnics in Singapore offer a three-year diploma course, after a student's secondary school education. They enter the polytechnics after having passed their General Certification of Education at the Ordinary level (GCE 'O' level). Students usually enter these institutions at age of 17 or 18. Polytechnics offer a range of tertiary courses ranging from engineering, business studies, hospitality, nursing, digital media, mass communications etc. There are currently five polytechnics in Singapore which reports to the Ministry of Education.

SPRING Singapore

SPRING Singapore is the enterprise development agency that helps Singapore enterprises grow. It also helps to develop and promotes internationally recognised standards and quality assurance infrastructure, enabling global competitiveness and facilitates global trade (SPRING Singapore, 2010). SPRING Singapore also looks into the development of productivity and efficiency within the workforce.

Workforce Development Agency

The Workforce Development Agency (WDA) is a statutory board, under the Ministry of Manpower. It aims to enhance the skills of the current workforce by providing continuing education (Singapore Workforce Development Agency, 2010). The WDA also works with many Institutes of Higher Learning and have them provide the platform to facilitate the necessary training.

<div align="center">**PART TWO**</div>

<div align="center">**Literature Review**</div>

Hospitality and Tourism Employment

The tourism and hospitality industry is noted to be one which has a very large scope. It comprises of many sectors ranging from hospitality, food and beverage, conferences and conventions, recreation, etc. In order to understand the diversity of job roles within the tourism and hospitality line, Airey & Frontistis (1997) has advocated that it is important to see the job roles from the point of view of the individual rather than from the macro industrial perspective. They claimed that by doing so, one would get a more accurate insight than from seeing it from a holistic vantage point.

On this note, the image of people's occupation and status from the tourism and hospitality line can be vague and misleading. People can have different insights and impressions of the same job. However, ultimately, the way that a person feels about his or her job is very much dependent upon his or her performance and satisfaction derived.

As mentioned above that its image is vague, people have separate views of the jobs available in the tourism and hospitality line. The UK National Economic Development Council (1992) stated that the tourism line gives workers the opportunity to travel, meet people and learn a foreign language. However, many people, as well as academic journals and articles have deemed this as a low status career, where there is little motivation and encouragement (Copper & Shepherd, 1997). Sindiga (1994) described jobs in the tourism and hospitality lines as being seen as menial, demeaning and meant for low-skilled workers. Pizzam (1982) further stated that the employees within the line are often looked upon as being uneducated, unmotivated, untrained, unskilled and unproductive.

Despite the above negative statements about the trade, the tourism industry is still one that does offer a certain amount of job satisfaction. Riley (1996) stated that due to the fluid

nature of the jobs and their flexible work structure, many find it attractive in terms of shift work, number of hours work, etc. According to Mars & Mitchell (1979), the industry also attracts people who find making permanent friendships difficult and preferred short-lived and jovial relationships.

Characteristics of Employment in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

The tourism and hospitality industry is one which is manifested in many sectors, namely the hotels, tour operators, transportation companies, food and beverage companies etc. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (2010), the global tourism employment is estimated to rise to 235,785,000 jobs or 1 in 12.3 jobs in the year 2010, which is approximately 8.1% of the world's jobs. By Year 2020, 9.2% of total global employment will be involved in tourism and hospitality, i.e. 303,019,000 positions. These jobs will include both direct and indirect employment. Direct employment would imply jobs that help in the creation of the business, whereas indirect employment arise out of businesses that produce goods and services that assist in supplying visitors and travellers directly. In Singapore, the number of tourism jobs account for 6.3% of total employment or 1 in every 15.9 jobs i.e. 232,000 jobs in Year 2010, and up to 7.3% of total employment or 1 in every 13.8 jobs by Year 2020 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2010).

Despite the high number of figures shown, it is difficult to calculate or confirm numbers relative to the nature of the tourism and hospitality industry. The complexities of the industry due to part-time work and seasonality create methodological difficulties in accounting for the absolute number of people involved in the hospitality and tourism trade (Hansen & Jensen, 1996; Losekoot & Wood, 2001).

In order to achieve the above figures shown, the Singapore government, through the Singapore Tourism Board nonetheless has proceeded to encourage greater attraction for people to join the tourism and hospitality trade, through its websites and tradeshows

(Singapore Tourism Board, 2010). The Singapore government is currently also working through the Singapore Tourism Board , SPRING Singapore, supported by the Workforce Development Agency (WDA) with the local Institutes of Higher Learning and the local Polytechnics to develop more tourism and hospitality-related programs and courses (Asiatraveltips.com, 2006).

However, in order for these programs to be successful, it is necessary to have an insight on the tourism and hospitality industry. The hospitality and tourism is unique and different from other industries such as information technology, banking etc. Below are the characteristics of the said industry.

Labour intensive

The industry is one which is highly in need of labour. It is noted that compared to other industries, more job positions are needed for the same amount of investment that is required in a certain field. One of the reasons why there is such a need for people is because of the nature of its guest services and also its late adoption of technology and newer management process, as cited by Bull (1995). The amount of labour that is needed is also very much dependent on the stage of development of the said locality in terms of infrastructure and tourism (Kusluvan, 1994). Generally in developing countries, there is a higher need for manpower as compared to developed nations. In the case of Singapore, the need for competent and professional staff is due to the building of the Integrated Resorts and the deregulation of the number of lodging establishments by the Singapore government.

Quasi-skilled nature of the jobs

The job nature of tourism and hospitality-related jobs is basically of an unskilled or quasi-skilled nature. This means to say that there is little need for certifications and qualifications for a job in this industry. The nature of the work can be picked up quickly and

easily by staff that join hospitality and tourism related establishments. According to Riley (1996), up to 64% of the jobs within this field do not require a formal education.

There is a great emphasis on craft-based, operational skills that can be easily attained on the job without the need for a diploma or a certificate (International Labour Organisation, 2001). Given the lack of 'sophisticated' or 'profession' skills, there is a correlation between the tourism and hospitality industry and being stereotyped as low paying, being of a lower status and have poorer working environments (Wood, 1997).

It is also noted by Hjalager & Andersen (2001) that workers in the hospitality line who have formal education do not have formal training in the hospitality field. Many of such staff holds certifications from other academic fields, such as engineering, business etc. This is especially so with migrant workers, for example Filipinos and Indonesians who re-locate to tourism hotspots, such as Dubai and Singapore to work.

Low status of employment

According to Pizzam (1982), many of the people look upon the tourism and hospitality employee as one which is often 'uneducated, unmotivated, unskilled and unproductive' (p.5). This is also due to the fact that the nature of the job is non-permanent due to seasonal issues, occasional part-time work, low skilled, lowly paid and having poor working conditions, as compared to other more stable jobs. Historically, this form of work is often seen as servitile and regarded as being dirty, worthless, and a woman's job involving cooking, serving, cleaning and clearing up (Guerrier, 1999).

Geographically, Pizzam (1982) also presented that job status is looked upon differently from a regional context. In Latin America, jobs in the hospitality are not especially well respected due to the nature of the low pay. Pizzam & Telisman-Kosuta (1989) mentioned that in Eastern Europe, jobs in the hospitality do not enjoy particularly high status, although they were seen to be professional and can be considered as a life-time career. Jobs that

commanded greater respect were management staff such as hotel and restaurant managers. In the Asian context, especially in Singapore and Japan, a job is hospitality line is often regarded as low in status, due to its service nature. Lee & Kang (1998) mentioned that the phenomena is due to the deeply-seeded reverence to the teaching of Confucianism that claimed the 'good sons do not become soldiers, waiters and coolies'.

However, the status of such employment may not hold true in developing economies, such as in Vietnam, Indonesia, China or other traditionally inclined countries. In many such countries, the opportunity to work in a hospitality firm might be seen as a higher status as compared to a commoner. The positive effects would be the ability to learn a foreign language, opportunity to travel to foreign destinations, and to work in foreign multi-national firms.

High levels of attrition

Employment in the tourism and hospitality line is often characterised by high levels of attrition. This attrition level is usually highest amongst 'rank and file' and operational staff (Lucas, 1995).

This attrition can be due to positive factors and negative ones. The positive factors that attribute to turnover can be due to an accelerated career progression, a change of work environment due to positive leadership and ownership, and poaching of staff to better and high pay and working environments respectively.

There are also other factors that cause staff to leave their positions. This can be from a neutral stand-point. This can be due to changes in the political, economic or social front (Kusluvan, 1994). Examples will be the seasonal nature of the job nature, growth of hospitality enclaves in global regions, upheaval in political event etc. Generally, such neutral causes of movement are beyond the control of staff.

The negative push factors that attribute to staff leaving can be attributed to many factors. Below are but some of the many factors: limited career advancement; stress and burn-out; poor management practices, poor image of the hospitality industry, instable job employment. (Arthur Anderson, 2000; Boella, 2000; Hjalager & Andersen, 2001; Ryan, 1991).

According to Woods (1999), the hospitality industry serves as one which is considered a 'pass-through' or a phase in one's career. Many workers are considered as transient and will move on to work in other areas. This is especially so for operational staff, who work on a part-time basis. It is also so for younger workers who see a job in the hospitality line as a temporal means of earning a quick buck to clear college fees.

The high attrition rate in the tourism and hospitality trade can lead to other negative consequences impacting other staff who are working in the hotel. These ramifications will ultimately have a vicious cyclical impact on the remaining staff, forcing them to leave as well. Some of the consequences of high attrition are induced stress, lowered morale, increased workload and working hours due to shortage of staff, delayed deadlines in the introduction of new policies and programmes, higher replacement cost, wastage of money spent in training, poor services, low productivity, un-loyal staff, and decreased productivity (Iverson & Deery, 1997; Rowley & Purcell, 2001).

In the hospitality line, as cited by Woods (1999), an average hospitality job span in the America would be about 1.5 years in 1997. In the United Kingdom, an average job span of 1.5 to 2 years in the hospitality industry is considered reasonable for full-time rank and file staff, according to Rowley & Purcell (2001). This clearly shows that turnover is a constant in the industry.

Given the above average length of stay in a hospitality job, different geographical regions reflects different variation and percentages in turnover. In 2001, the average turnover

rate in America for its operational staff is approximately 51.7% (International Labour Organisation, 2001). In Asia, the turnover rate is about 30%. According to Khatri, Budhwar & Chong (1999), the turnover percentage within the Singapore hospitality lines, i.e. hotels and restaurants in 1995, 1996 and 1997 are 67.2%, 54% and 57.6% respectively. However compared to National Average given by the Ministry of Manpower (2010), the average turnover for the nation was approximately about 2% from 1999 to 2009. This would imply that the attrition within the Singapore tourism and hospitality in very high compared to other industries but equivalent to other developed countries.

Employment in small and medium-sized hospitality enterprises (SMEs)

Although there has been an increase in the number large multi-national hotels, food and beverage firms and other tourism and hospitality companies globally, the industry is still populated by many small and medium sized companies (Baum, 1999; Lee-Ross, 1999; Piso, 1999). In Singapore, the Singapore Tourism Board officially ranks hotels according to whether they are Luxury, Mid-Tier or Economy (Govmonitor, 2009), however this would not give an accurate idea on how many rooms each property has.

According to the Singapore Hotel Licensing Board (2010), there are a total of 276 licensed hotels in Singapore. The Singapore Hotel Industry Survey 2008 for financial year 2007, categorized hotels into three categories, namely small, medium or large. Hotel that had 350 rooms or less were deemed small; Hotels that had 351 to 499 rooms were considered medium and lodging establishments with 500 rooms and more were termed as large properties. A count of the 276 hotels revealed that more than 81% of the hotels in the Singapore were considered small hotels in relation to the Singapore Hotel Survey.

This correlates to a study conducted by Baum (1999) that stated that 90% of tourist lodging establishments were from the small category. Baum (1999) further purported that small hotels correlates to a small workforce and that small businesses in tourism do not

necessarily have the capacity, capability, resources or commitment to support the human resources development function in a manner that would enable them to compete effectively against larger organisations. Hence due to this, human resources management within these firms might lack professionalism, the organisation might incur poor organisational performance and might not have the financial capital to support its staff.

Transferability of staff skills

The skills that are acquired in the tourism and hospitality service are generally basic. These skills are not of a technical nature and can be put to use in other sectors, as well as other service industries such as insurance and banking (Guerrier, 1999; Riley, 1996). These skills being not specific can be seen by employees as being too 'commoditised' and not as a specialist. This can be perceived by many as a cause for having low morale.

As mentioned by Baum (1995), due to the skill nature of being commoditized, it may accentuate the high turnover rate, as well as the poor conditions of employment, since there is a large pool of workers with the same skill set available. Companies within the industry do not see a need to retain staff as there is an abundance of available labour.

Attitudes of Hospitality Students

There have been many researchers who have studied the attitudes of hospitality students who are seeking careers in the hospitality and tourism line. According to Kusluvan (2003), it was important to understand the attitudes of students to gain an insight to the reasons why many students are disinclined to join the line or choose to leave the industry after having stayed in the trade for a relatively short period. In order to understand this, Kusluvan (2003) mentioned that it was important to see the perspectives of students who are currently pursuing a hospitality curriculum and those that have graduated.

Current students

Casado (1992) in his study looked at a group of 96 hospitality students from a university in America. In his research, he noted that many of these students were working on a part-time basis and were paid less than the average waged worker. Many of these students worked above the 40 hours as required by the industry and were usually not given much training on the job or any form of orientation. This is very similar to the situation in Singapore, whereby many hospitality students work in the hospitality line either of their own volition, or as part of a requirement for their course of study. During these work periods, many are not properly inducted into the organization and paid less than the full-timers. Although these students do expect such treatments initially, in the long term, as quoted by Casado (1992), many become 'turn over statistics'.

In another study that was done in Scotland by Barron & Maxwell (1993), they compared hospitality students that were still in an institution of higher education. They looked at students that had previous work experience in the hotel line and those that have not worked at all. They found that students embarking on their hospitality management course and those who have completed their work attachments or have previous experience hold opposing views of the nature of working life in the industry. Specifically, new students tend to have a more positive and idealistic outlook, whereas students that had some background held negative views. The researchers, having interviewed both camps commented the senior students claimed that the new students had unrealistic and glamorous perceptions of the line. This has been especially so due to the influences from print media and social online media. Moreover, these senior students also commented that there was limited prospect when it came to job opportunities and promotions. They also mentioned that the jobs within the trade were financially unrewarding, profits were put before the staff, and little training was provided.

Barron (1997) further emphasised this unrealistic outlook by junior students in another research. In a study of 160 first year hospitality students from Australia, the students felt that people within the trade are treated fairly and enjoy a good working environment with opportunities to socialise. They felt that hospitality companies would put people before profits and would grant positions of authority and responsibility to them quickly within the span of their early career. Barron (1997) said that many of these students have chosen to work in the hospitality trade after graduation and they commented that it was the general public, and not themselves who viewed the profession as being semi-professional and second class.

In Singapore, a study was conducted by Litvin (2000) that studied tourism and hospitality students at Ngee Ann Polytechnic. Of the 133 student interviewed, 80% of them had realistic expectations of their future prospective job, in terms of their salary range and job environment. They also claimed that they would choose a job in the hospitality trade after their graduation. However 44% of the cohort said that they would not accept non-standard working hours, i.e. standard hours being 9am -5pm office administrative work, and non-weekend jobs. Litvin (2000) mentioned that this divergence in expectations will lead to much disillusion and dissatisfaction amongst the polytechnic graduates.

It has also been noted in a study by Jenkins (2001) that students' interest in the hospitality career tend to decline as they proceed through their years at the institution of learning. Jenkins (2001) undertook a study of the International Hospitality Management School in Leeuwarden, The Netherlands and at the University of Huddersfield, Division of Hospitality Management in the United Kingdom. Through his research he discovered that students that stayed true to the career in the hospitality path verged towards administrative positions, such as accounting, training and development, sales and marketing, and human resources rather than towards operations. Moreover, once again, students' expectations were

unrealistic, noting that two thirds of the students were planning to be General Managers within a short span of ten years. This again will lead to much disappointment and disillusion for the students at a later stage of their career. To support the above, Gowers (2009), Chief Executive, Intercontinental Hotels Group, Asia Pacific shared at a Cornell-Nanyang Distinguished Dean Lecture series that many of his Cornell alumni did not join the operations divisions after graduating with a hospitality degree.

In another study conducted by Sciarini, Woods, Boger, Gardner & Harris (1997) on career interests and perceptions of the profession by hospitality students at two institutions in the USA, they realised that students had little understanding of the hospitality industry. Many students showed little interest in operational and lower manual level of the hospitality trade, but had high interest in managerial positions. Furthermore, when the respondents were asked whether they were interested in the hospitality trade, only 25% said that they had the desire to join as a professional after graduation. Many even did not know the reason as to why they had enrolled in such a course.

Getz (1994) conducted a study of students in the Spey Valley in Scotland. In his study comparing students in 1978 and in 1992, he found that many current students have had a change of mind on the tourism and hospitality industry. In the former year of 1978, 43% of students within the Spey Valley agreed that jobs in this specific industry were fulfilling and satisfying. However in latter year of 1992, this percentage fell to 29%. According to the study, despite the Spey Valley being a tourism locality and influences from relations and parents who have worked in the industry, many students have a bad impression of the industry and would like to pursue a higher education and move out of the local area and industry. However, it must noted that the Spey Valley is deteriorating as a tourism hot spot and this could be a reason for the lack of interest and apparent attitude as purported by Murphy (1985), who argued that employment in the tourism and hospitality is related to the

growth of the tourism in a said locality. This has also been supported by Ross (1994) who found direct correlation between interest and tourism growth.

Educators can also influence the choice of a hospitality career. There have been studies that both supported education being a positive and negative influence to students. In a study conducted by Machatton & Owens (1995), they discovered that the more students learned about the industry, the more interested they were about joining the line. This has been supported in other studies conducted in both developed and developing countries i.e. Greece (Airey & Frontistis, 1997), Arizona, USA (Cothran & Combrink, 1999) and in Trinidad and Tobago (Lewis, 1999). However, Cothran & Combrink (1999) did highlight that in many other countries, there was an inverse relationship between interests in the trade and the knowledge garnered through a hospitality academic program.

Graduates from tourism and hospitality programs

As for those who have graduated, there have been many studies conducted in this area with regards to the perception of the industry from graduates. Pavesic & Brymer (1990) looked at the post education attitudes of 442 management graduates from 11 college level schools. Through their research, they discovered that up to 28% were not working in the hospitality line. According to the Pavesic & Brymer (1990), many of the respondents cited reasons such as low job satisfaction, poor working conditions and lack of motivating factors. Although many graduates said that they did like certain aspects of the trade, i.e. having a challenging, interdependence and rewarding work; professional and public contacts; fast pace and dynamic environment, many said that they disliked factors such as long hours, night and weekend schedule; low pay; stressful environment; demanding duties; no personal time and quality of life; lack of advancement and recognition; company politics; labour shortages, poorly trained staff and lack of motivation from employees, managers and working peers' attitudes.

Holden & Jameson (1999) did a study on hospitality graduates in small and medium sized hospitality organisations, which constituted much of the hospitality industry as mentioned earlier in this study. The research revealed that many graduates found that these graduates were working at the operational and supervisory level with skills that were below their capacity in terms of what they have studied at college. According to the findings, the respondents cited that the work was hard, often physically demanding and required long hours. Through this analysis, Holden & Jameson (1999) purported that many such small medium enterprises (SME) hospitality firms fail to recognise the graduate identity or their needs and capabilities.

Conclusion

From the above research and write-ups on the perceptions of the students towards the tourism and hospitality line, there is much evidence to claim that this industry is very much still in its infancy and many processes have not been laid out to retain and reduce attrition. Leaders within the tourism and hospitality should take a proactive step into addressing these pertinent issues to avoid a talent drain. It can also be noted that hospitality students are generally very much misinformed about the industry prior to enrolling on such a program. Many are either undecided about their career choices in the future or choose to deviate from the course, and pursue a non-related tourism and hospitality career after graduation. From this analysis, campaigns should be set up by the respective countries and their tourism-related authorities to address this matter. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) 1990 Labour Conference (2010) has encouraged countries to look at the disparity matter when compared to other industries.

PART THREE

Introduction

Given the many students are disinclined to join the tourism and hospitality industry as cited earlier, the industry faces a paramount issue of recruiting and retaining local talent. In Singapore, the need for manpower to sustain growth in the hospitality line is vitally important with the increase in room inventory and the growing number of hotels and tourism-related establishments. Moreover, the recent policy imposed by the Ministry of Manpower, Singapore has dictated companies and hotels to keep foreign labour down by imposing higher levies for expatriate labour. This move is to increase productivity levels for the entire workforce (Saad, 2010). On an economy as a whole, the influx of foreign workers has decreased, i.e. in 2007, the inflow of foreign workers is 144,500; in 2008, the number of foreign talent arriving shrunk to 144,500 (Kor, 2010). At present, of Singapore's 5 million workers, 1.25 million were foreigners and 533 thousand are on permanent residence status (Geo, 2010). Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong mentioned that in view of the levy imposed, the number of foreign workers arriving in 2010 will be at approximately 10,000 (Kor, 2010). According to K. Ong (personal communications, June 16, 2010), General Manager of the Rendezvous Hotel, who stated that this reduction in manpower and the quota set by the Ministry of Manpower leads to harder hiring practices. He mentioned that at present up to 25% of his hotel of 140 employees are from foreign countries. This move implies that hotels have to rely on more Singaporeans especially those trained in tourism and hospitality to join the industry.

In order to further understand the reasons why Singaporean students are unwilling to join the hospitality and tourism industry, one must look from the perspective of the students, i.e. their values, perception, background, education, etc.; the industry, i.e. the career path, training, pay, locality of establishment; and the education aspect, i.e. curriculum, internship,

field visits, teachers, resource allocation etc. A model of these factors has been depicted on Appendix A.

With these factors identified, further recommendations can be suggested so that education institutions and industrial players can mitigate the matter of students avoiding the tourism and hospitality trade.

Methodology

Graduate Survey obtained from Temasek Polytechnic

In order to derive factual information of the industry and the current standing of the Singapore polytechnic graduate students, the survey results from Temasek Polytechnic School of Business's 2010 graduate survey were obtained. This survey was conducted for graduates of the commencement of 2009 and looked at all diplomas offered within the School of Business. The diplomas offered ranged from General Business, Information Technology, Communications and Media, Logistics, Marketing, Law and Management, Retail, and the hospitality cluster diplomas of Hospitality and Tourism Business, Hospitality and Tourism Management, Leisure and Resort Management and Culinary and Catering Managing. The questions that were raised ranged from the present employment of the students to the evaluation of the diploma program. Examples of the employment questions posed included the industry of employment, monthly remuneration, relevance of the course of study towards employment, prospective desirable job sectors.

In terms of the questions pertaining to the course of study, the survey looked at the relevance of the curriculum to future jobs, the importance of student internship programs etc. The answers from the students will give an indication on how they perceive their diploma relevant and valuable in terms of future financial gains, the ability to scale their future organizations and industries. These answers also indicated indirect correlation as to whether they are satisfied with their study, their relationship with their peers and lecturers etc.

Personal communication

In view of the dynamic and quick changes in the hospitality trade, personal communication with industrial leaders and movers gave a more current perspective of the industry as compared to journal articles and books. However, these insights can be subjected to opinions and might not be representative of the industry as a whole. Viewpoints and insights were given from operational staff, i.e. general and operational managers and leaders, human resources practitioners, trade union representatives and educational academia. Each of these representatives looked at the matter of recruitment from different angles and this enabled the study to be more holistic and current.

Journal articles and books

Journal article and academic books were used extensively. These resources gave empirical studies and research material that helped substantiate and support findings. Although, these researches found in these articles and books were from various geographical locations and years, there is a strong correlation that in most developed countries there is a strong inclination that students are disinterested in joining the hospitality and tourism trade after graduation. There were many articles from Hong Kong which has many similarities to Singapore in terms of culture, economic success, and racial-mix.

Internet

Research was not only limited to print resources, as the internet gave much current information especially on statistics, government policies, and current news and affairs. These websites included news web pages, e.g. Straits Times online; database websites, e.g. the Singapore National Library and University of Nevada, Las Vegas' library database; government regulation websites, such as Ministry of Manpower, Singapore, Singapore Tourism Board, Hotel Licensing Board websites, etc.

Business Plan

From the literature review presented earlier, the reasons why students are disinclined to join the tourism and hospitality industry are very much varied. However, these reasons can be consolidated into three major influences, namely personal, educational, and industrial. Each of these influences can be further sub-divide into specific factors.

Personal (Self) Influences

Under personal influences, factors such as perception of the industry i.e. the status can play as important deciding factors. Other reasons would be the educational level of the student, and his potential to obtain a higher educational qualification. Another factor would be that of past experience. This experience can be from previous work experience or stays in a hotel. The background of an individual will also play an important role in a person's decision to join the tourism and hospitality trade. Lastly, an individual's outlook of life will be one of the important reasons of choosing a tourism-related career.

Educational Influences

As for educational influences, there are many factors that can shift a student's career choice. As cited by Litvin (2000), hospitality teachers' knowledge, perception and outlook of the industry can be a motivational factor in joining the tourism and hospitality industry. Curriculum does also play an important role. Curriculum can be further subdivided into academic (classroom-based, guest speakers) or field based (i.e. site inspections, field trips). Another component that can have an integral impact on the choice of career would be that of an internship program. The institution offering hospitality courses that have strong links to the industry with multiple opportunities to get involved in events such as openings, visits and talks can entice students to stay within the industry. Moreover tertiary institutions with appropriate facilities and resources, such as the offering of computer-aided hospitality related programs and skills, such as property management system, actual restaurants, mock-up hotel

rooms and hotels, and media and library resources can stir up further interest. Lastly, the reputation of the education institute might have a direct correlation to the percentage of students joining the industry after graduation.

Industrial Influences

The industry would also play a huge role in whether students would join them. The industry would imply both on a macro-level and on a micro-level i.e. the employers. The nature of many employers within the tourism and hospitality industry requires staff to put in longer hours as compared to the regular 8 hours office shift. In terms of work, irregular shift work, and the need for staff to work during public holidays and weekends will impact many students in joining the industry. Another factor would be that of pay. Generally, remuneration of service line workers is lower than that of other industries and this does affect student joining the trade. The challenge of serving others or working in an environment that is non-consistent can affect job applicants. There are other factors that will be discussed at length in this paper.

<div align="center">

Model of Interest and Attrition

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From these influences and factors, a model of interest and attrition can be drawn to highlight the reasons why students do not wish to join the hotel trade despite having studied a course related to this industry. Furthermore, a weighted balance score card can be applied to different tourism and hospitality companies, so that they can better understand their own operations and conduct their own surveys for students working in their companies. Similarly this model can be given to students to gauge their expectations at each year of their course, so that educators can gauge student's continued interest, their delivery of their course and the need for additional school facilities. This model is depicted in Appendix A.

Each third of the circle displays the different influences and this is further subdivided into various factors. Each radial represents a factor that can influence a student's choice of

entering the industry. Likewise each radial is rated according to the degree by which students are inclined to join the hospitality trade. The grades range from '1' to '10' diverging from the circle's core. A score of '1' would imply that the a student is very willing to join the industry based on that specific factor, and score of '10' would depict that a specific factor has negative influences on a student joining the industry. Although this model has not been put into practice, evaluators of the model will be able to evaluate specific influences or factors that have an impact on joining and attrition. Tourism and hospitality firms can also measure and benchmark their own retention and attraction factors, and decide on a critical average score within their sector. This is to be decided by each property, organization and establishment, each with their own quantitative values.   Lastly, the score for all components can be tallied up to give government bodies such as the Ministry of Manpower, Singapore Workforce Development Agency and the Singapore Tourism Board an insight of the causes of students not joining the industry.

Application to the Singapore Polytechnic Hospitality Student Context to the Model

Although surveys can be developed to further quantify the respective values for each factor within the model, certain conclusions can be drawn from research and applied to the Singapore context from previous studies and researches. Below are some areas that were explored and derived from such researches.

Self: Perception on remuneration

A graduation survey was conducted for all graduates from Temasek Polytechnic's Business School for the commencement of 2009. The Temasek Polytechnic Business School Survey (2010) obtained quantitative data with regards to graduates' current jobs in terms of remuneration, time taken to obtain a job, relevancy of the jobs to the diploma obtained etc.

From the survey conducted, the Hospitality and Tourism cluster diploma, i.e. Diploma of Leisure and Resort Management (LRM), Diploma of Hospitality and Tourism

Management (HTM) and the Diploma in Culinary and Catering Management (CCM), had many graduates earning less than $1400 per month after graduation. The breakdown according to the survey is as follows: 57% of the cohort from CCM earned less than $1,400 per month; 74% of the cohort from HTM earned less than $1,400 per month; 62% of the cohort from LRM earned less than $1,400 per month.

As compared to the generalist diplomas such as Diploma in Business (BUS) or the Diploma in Account & Finance (A&F), only about less than 56% of the cohort earns less than $1,400 per month. Given these statistics, it is can surmise that the hospitality line generally pays less than other industries, hence students might not be inclined to join the industry.

The availability of other job positions in other sectors, such as banking, insurance, and realty, which offers better remuneration, might further hinder hospitality students from joining the industry. The Hay Group (2009) reported in 2009 that average pay for the following sector for fresh diploma graduates are as follows. Engineering – S$1,700; IT and Telecommunications – S$1,800; Finance and Accounting - $1,695; Logistics and Supply Chain - $1,700. The average pay for a Front Desk Agent, an entry position in a hotel is about $1,200, which has a huge disparity as compared to the other sectors (K. Ong, personal communications, June 16, 2010).

Self: Perception on educational levels

According to M.A. Kiffly (personal communications, July 15, 2010) another reason why students are disinclined to join the hotel trade is due to the perceptions of the education for the positions in the tourism trade. Recruitment advertisements featured in the Singapore local newspapers for entry-level positions for the hospitality and tourism grade always peg diploma graduates with GCE 'O' level school leavers. By doing so, diplomas holders are unable to leverage on their educational qualifications earned and are seen to be competing with students who are from a lower educational stratum.

Self: Values

As mentioned by Gursoy, Maier & Chi (2008), the values of the students are very much different from pervious generations (i.e. the baby-boomers (born 1943 – 60) and the Generation X (born 1961 – 80)). Currently the generation that is working in the hospitality line comprises predominantly of the Generation X and a minority of baby-boomers. These two generations groups, have different views of work. The baby-boomers are characterised by hard-work, sincerity and the belief in a central authority system. They also do have a fear of change and of technology (Gursoy, Maier & Chi, 2008). The X-ers (Generation X) are characterised by being self-reliant and being tech-savvy. They also see jobs as being temporal and willing to change occupations easily if it allows them to achieve their goals.

Most Singapore diploma graduating students are presently between the ages of 19 – 23 and therefore fall under the generation group of the millennials, who are born between the years of 1981 – 2000. According to Gursoy, Maier & Chi (2008), people of such an age group tend to espouse characteristics such as being collective, not being loyal to an organization, wanting flexible work schedules (but this is not a priority to them). However as opposed to X-ers, they have a tendency to have entire career changes or build parallel career treks. They are also not burdened down by responsibilities such as paying for a housing mortgage, car payment and supporting a family (children or parents) due to their age, as compared to their X-ers.

Given the above reasons and more so in Singapore, where other jobs are aplenty, diploma polytechnic students are very influenced by peers who are seeking other career options. Moreover, both generally and culturally in Singapore, students does not move out of their parental homes until they are married. It is financially impossible for Singaporean students to own their own cars. Hence they have more flexibility not to pursue a hospitality and tourism career.

Self: Perception of Background

In 1995, one household in every ten Singapore families has a foreign domestic helper-maid as cited in Migration News (1995). In 2010, this number has increased. Lui (2010, March 31) stated that there is one domestic worker in roughly every six Singaporean households. The maid in such families usually take care all chores, such as cleaning, washing, cooking and other menial tasks.

Given that these Singapore students are exposed to an environment that all their needs are being taken care of and served, it is postulated that many students will not be inclined to join the hospitality trade, where service is an integral part of the job. For many students, they might feel that the status of work might be below what they are used to at home. Moreover, they might not be comfortable or suited to mundane task such as cleaning and serving. Lastly, their parents might feel that it could be shameful or a 'lost of face' by having a child working at such a low-level entry position, due to cultural reasons.

Industry: Macro – Environmental Attrition

The hospitality and tourism industry is characterised as one which is dynamic and challenging. It is known by many that it is a 24/7 industry that does not sleep, as one would need to attend to guest needs and operations. As cited in Princeton review (n.d.), many hotel workers claimed that there were mentally and physically exhausted at the end of the day. A survey conducted by Princeton review (n.d.) claimed that 'over 70% of the respondents said that 'tired' was an understatement about how they felt at the end of the day'.

Given the above, generally the hospitality and tourism industry is one that is faced with high turnover, i.e. 57.6% in 1997 as compared to other industries as mentioned earlier (Ministry of Manpower, 2010). This attrition factor will indirectly affect both students who are applying for positions as well as students who have just started their careers. Prospective students could look at the high-rate of turnover through the many featured recruitment

advertisements in internet portals and newspapers and attribute this to a bad working environment. This high turnover will also affect current staff, as greater and overwhelming responsibilities are given to them to shoulder. Given time, they might leave to find other prospects as well.

Industry: Shift work and Hours of work

The hospitality and tourism industry is one which is characterised by long hours and shift work. Although the Singapore government encouraged a 5-day work week for all industries in 2004 (Teo, 2007), many hotel's operational divisions are still running on a 6-day work week. Generally an average worker is required to work 44 hours per week in Singapore, however due to the nature of the tourism and hospitality, many staff are required to work more than stipulated hours due to late arrival, groups, last minute request etc. Moreover, Singapore being an Asian paternalistic society, some staff are afraid of leaving the office prior to their superiors (Taylor, 2006). According to Asia Development Bank (2010), most industries in Singapore such as manufacturing, construction, public administration have seen a decrease in the number of hours worked however there has been an increase in hours worked in the hotel and restaurant industry by almost one extra hour per day since 2008. In general, the average Singaporean employee in the workforce works up to 53 hours per week (Granthornton, 2007), it can only be speculated that the hours worked by the employees in the hospitality and tourism sector to be much higher to average off the number of hours maintained by other industries. However, there is no conclusive quantitative research to confirm this.

As most hospitality students upon graduation enter the operations divisions in hospitality and tourism industry, they are subjected to the needs of operations which are carried out throughout the day (shift work), including weekends and public holidays. Coupled with the stressful nature of the work, dealing with irate guest and the fast pace

nature of the line, students are disinclined to work in the industry (Kang & Gould, 2002) after joining the trade. Moreover, Singapore on a whole prefers to work in environment that gives them the weekend off and have an office work-life balance (Litvin, 2000).

Industry: Promotional aspect

In Singapore, most hotels practise annual promotional exercises. These promotions are based on annual appraisals which are conducted on a yearly basis. Human resources practitioners will look at deciding factors such as performance, contributions to the company, length of service and recommendations by line managers, prior to giving the general manager to approve. Various hotels have different determining factors.

According to M.A. Kiffly (personal communications, July 15, 2010), this practice does not bode well with students who feel that their promotional chances are being stifled, and having their work not being recognised. A study conducted by Chiang & Jang (2008) revealed that approximately 48% employees (below the age of 25) and 95% holding at least high school degree valued better opportunities in career advancement and feelings of accomplishments. Gursoy, Maier & Chi (2008) mentioned that millennials are characterized by 'instant gratification' and if their contributions are not immediate recognised, they might choose to leave the industry. Currently in Singapore, the number of years that a staff spent in a single position averaged between 2- 5 years (K. Ong, personal communications, June 16, 2010; J. Tee, personal communications, July 15, 2010).

Industry: Skills (Transferable) and Training

According to National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) industrial relations executives (S. Chin; M.A. Kiffly; J. Tee, personal communications, July 15, 2010), the skill-set of hospitality and tourism diploma graduates are generally transferable. This implies that the skills learnt from their diploma allows them to enter many fields within the tourism and

hospitality industry, as students do take on modules such as food and beverage, front office, housekeeping, ticketing etc.

However, this generalist approach might not be favourable for the interest of their academic course, as hospitality students might feel that a diploma in Hospitality Management might not be of much value, as most normal people might be able to do their job roles. There is much debate of whether a Diploma in Hospitality Management is considered a professional education. Khan (1992) claims that many scholars are beginning to view hospitality management as a professional discipline, however Ladki (1993) has stated that many people feel otherwise. As Singapore is generally a country where students are pushed to acquire professional and academic excellence and certification, students might prefer diplomas that are more in-depth, professional and recognised, such engineering or a law certification. In their eyes, hospitality courses could be seen to be quasi-professional comparatively.

Chiang, Back & Canter (2005) mentioned training is a most important aspect of keeping staff happy. According to their research, they found that there is a correlation between extensive and relevant training given to staff to job satisfaction and their intention to stay in a job. Supporting this fact are researches done by Kang & Gould (2002) and Jenkins (2001). They cited that the lack of training and developmental opportunities could be a disincentive for students to join and stay in the trade. In respectable hotels in Singapore, new joiners are placed on an orientation, induction and on boarding program during their commencement. However, due to the shortage of manpower in the hospitality arena in Singapore at the moment, many new-comers are placed into the job without training, however shadowing a senior staff. This causes much vexation for new joiners and can be a negative experience.

Moreover, unlike the Singapore Civil Service where there is a mandatory training requirement of 100 hours per staff per year, staff rotation and external exposure, the

hospitality and tourism industry has little or non-regulated fixed hours or development for their employees (Careers@gov., 2010). With the recent outbreaks of SARS and H1N1, and the economic downturn, more hospitality companies are realising the need for training and are changing their training focus. (F. Lai, personal communications, August 5, 2010; J. Tan, personal communications, August 13, 2010) However, until hotel association bodies such as the Singapore Hotel Association, etc. start regulating and auditing such training, hotels' training programmes will still be proprietary to the individual properties and no mandate will be made on the minimum amount of hours needed to be given to each employee on a national level.

Industry: Stress

The nature of the hospitality and tourism industry is known to be stressful (O'Neill & Davis, forthcoming). According to O'Neill & Davis (forthcoming), the two most common causes of stress for hourly employed workers are from interpersonal tensions and from work overload. Interpersonal tensions come from interactions from customers as well as from staff.

According to J. Tee (personal communication, July 15, 2010), a major segment of the customers that hospitality and tourism staff deal with in Singapore are the locals. These are in areas of food and beverage, conventions and rooms departments. As most Singaporean locals are well-travelled, many have high expectations. J. Tee (personal communication, July 15, 2010) mentioned that dealing with the locals can be stressful since the locals have much experience in guest services and demand higher service standards. Moreover, O'Neill & Davis (forthcoming) also did mention that interpersonal tensions can come about from staff argument and conflicts of interest at work.

Given that Singapore will reduce the number of foreign workers as mentioned earlier, this will reduce the number of staff working in the hospitality and tourism field. This will reduce manning and impose greater work load, resulting in higher stress on existing staff.

Education: Lecturers' Attitude, Knowledge and Experience

Educators also play an important role in influencing the future career of students. As cited by Tesone (2005), academic leaders and educators are charged with the mantle of developing change within the industry. In order to do so, Singapore polytechnics have to ensure that prospective lecturers have the relevant knowledge, subject understanding and have placed strict criteria in the hiring for such positions. A research on some respectable polytechnics in Singapore revealed that the minimum requirement to teach hospitality courses at their institution would be a degree from a recognized university (preferable to have a Masters) and three years of managerial experience in a related field. (Ngee Ann Polytechnic, 2010; Temasek Polytechnic, 2010).

However, there are certain drawbacks to this, as many experienced hospitality and tourism practitioners do not have a degree or a formal education. According to Lashley (2004), up to 30% of hoteliers do not have degree and eligible to teach. Moreover, as practitioners continue to advance in their career, many may not wish to transfer to an educational institution, considering the increased in wages, benefits and perks that they are receiving from the industry. Hence the educational institutions are left with either academic staff that do not have the skills due to inexperience or staff that have left the industry for too long.

Moreover, staff coming from the industry might display attitudes that discourage students from joining the industry. As many of these practitioners do understand that the industry is not an easy work place, they might show subtle hints and signs to students not to enter the industry (S. Chin; J. Tee, personal communications, July 15, 2010). Moreover,

many educators fail to make clear to the students that what they do acquire at school is but a miniscule aspect of the whole industry. Many also do not instil values and ethnics of professionalism, leading to student failing to understand the industry as a whole (Pizam, 2007).

Education: Academia Curriculum

Curriculum development is of vital importance to bridge the gap between what is desired by the industry and what is given to the students to study. The curriculum must be realistic in terms of practicum, from an industrial standpoint and also from an academic perspective in acquiring concepts and theories. Ritchie (1995) cited that typical hotel schools must address the needs of the industry and focus on developing students who will stay and work in the line as managers in the future. Tas & Dopson (2004) mentioned that the development of curriculum should be pegged to industrial standards and reviewed through competencies grids and analysis. The curriculum must also enhance greater interest as the student progress through the years. Many polytechnics have adopted different pedagogies of teaching ranging from lectures, tutorials, discussions, problem-based learning, online games, etc. This is similar to programmes that are offered in Hong Kong hospitality institutions (Kivela & Kivela, 2005).

A research done by Kwong & Law (2008) revealed that hospitality students in a Hong Kong educational institution rated core- hospitality related subjects more important and relevant to the career prospects, as compared to general business management subjects. This study correlates to what the Singapore polytechnics have done well. Many polytechnics offering tourism and hospitality programs have remained relevant to the industry, as there is much emphasis on skills and relevant industry approaches in teaching. Many subjects and modules, such as Lodging Operations, Spa Operations Management etc. help anchor subjects to core skills, as compared to university level subjects which are more 'management-based'

(deVries & Downie, 2000). However, it must be noted that as students progress on through their hospitality and tourism courses, many do lose interest in the industry (Jenkins, 2001).

Education: Internships

Many local polytechnics practise a 20 week internship during their students' third year. Students will be sent to local and overseas hospitality and tourism establishments to obtain better exposure to the industry. However, according to Purcell & Quinn (1996), Getz (1994) and Kozar, Horton & Gregoire (2005), internships are actually detrimental to students joining the hotel line. Their researches have shown that internship experiences negatively affects hospitality student's attitude towards the trade. As Hong Kong is very similar to Singapore, the research conducted by Zhang and Wu (2004) can add value to Singapore understanding of hospitality students' internship. They purported that most students in tourism colleges have little practical knowledge of the industry, therefore sending them out to the industry can be a 'culture and reality shock'. According to Lam & Ching (2007), most students' expectations are not met during their internship.

According to Temasek Polytechnic's recent 2010 graduate survey, students from the Diploma of Tourism and Hospitality and Diploma of Leisure and Resort Management showed 5% and 4% respectively claiming that their internship did not help in their impression of their future job prospects, as compared to the Diploma of Business Information Technology and Diploma of Accountancy and Finance that had 0% and 2% respectively.

Education: Facilities and Resources

According to Tesone & Ricci (2005), industrial practitioners looked at three aspects of students when hiring and evaluating candidates. As cited by Ricci (2010), hospitality students are more sorts after, as compared to other general business graduates. These aspects are knowledge, attitudes and skills. On the note of skills, these aspects can only be acquired

if the educational institution has the resources to train the students so that they have the capability to work in the industry and to sustain continued interest.

Such resources would be simulations and training tools. Most polytechnics in Singapore do invest heavily in finances to the infrastructure and facilities for their students. Programs such as 'Opera' (a Property Management System), 'Micros' (Food and Beverage Point of Sales), and Abacus (Global Distribution System) are used in most respectable polytechnics to train students. It has also been stated by K.H. Boo (personal communication, August 17, 2010) that Temasek Polytechnic will launch the Temasek Tourism Academy in line with a collaboration with Singapore Institute of Technology – University of Nevada, Las Vegas to provide better platforms for learning and sustaining tourism interest amongst students.

Libraries with available online database system also help to facilitate hospitality students' learning, knowledge acquisition and further interest. Libraries, with online electronic databases are available in all polytechnics. In terms of skills practicum and acquisitions, Temasek Polytechnic and Republic Polytechnic have laboratories such as training restaurants, spa treatment rooms and mock-up hotel rooms for students to practice hand-on sessions and practicum.

All these facilities will indirectly create greater interest and skill acquisition. As cited by Kwong & Law (2008) such skill training holds high in the value of students. Moreover, it is stated by Harris, Kwansa & Lattuca Jr., (2006), that an educational institution's facilities and reputation does play a major factor is their recruitment strategy.

Education: Links to the Industry

It is generally noted that education institutions that have greater ties with the industry might be able to garner more support and interest amongst students. Linkages to the industry would imply guest speakers during lectures, forums, participation in seminars, assisting in

specific hospitality and tourism related events such as the F1 Grand Prix, Singapore Youth Olympics, grand openings of resorts and hotels etc.

Alan & Chak-Keung (2009) mentioned these form of activities, which gives students the ability to interact with industrial practitioners and work specifically at the site of the operations, can provide an authentic experience. They will also have opportunity to gain first hand experience, by putting theories into action. Students will also be able to learn about the hospitality and tourism trade, which is not taught within the confines of an educational institution and framework, such as dealing with superiors and politics.

However, in order to stay relevant and for sustained interest to grow, key learning objectives must be laid down by their hospitality educators. Moreover, in such cases, there is very limited structure formal training, and students would need to look beyond the traditional system of education to obtain the best value from such events and activities. Likewise, industrial practitioners must also continue to engage the interest of students during such sessions, lest it becomes a negative effect, rather than sustaining interest.

Conclusion

The tourism and hospitality industry has been one which has been severely neglected in the past. During the 1980s – 1990s, Singapore has concentrated on developing the information technology, logistics and manufacturing industries. (M.A. Kiffly, personal communications, July 15, 2010). During the 2000s, they realised a need to boost the tourism and hospitality to increase tourism receipts which accounts for about 3% of Singapore GDP at an estimated $12 billion (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2010). However, the mindsets of the people have not changed and they are not inclined to join the industry despite the growth. Many locals, especially the young see this line as one which is of low status, low pay and highly stressful with long and variable work hours. On the other hand, many tourism and hospitality companies have not changed as well. They are still steeped in traditional human

resources practices, for example constantly engaging staff from overseas, maintaining 6-day work weeks etc.

The government has recently taken steps to mitigate this mentality. They have curtailed the hiring of foreign labour, with the imposition of levies. This will indirectly increase greater productivity within the trade and set premium wages for current workers. They have also sponsored and created greater awareness of customer service through media programmes such as 'Can you serve?' and continued educational training (CET) through the Workforce Development Agency and the Employment and Employability Institute (e2i).

As the government has recently launched the above initiatives, there are still no conclusive quantifiable response and data from the local populace. This study narrows the spectrum of the population to hospitality students within the context of the local polytechnics in terms of their interest to joining the hospitality and tourism trade. It looks at three areas namely, from the context of the education provide by their schools, their own personal perception and from the standards and attractiveness of the industry. Perhaps with greater push from the government and better incentives provided by both the industry and the government, more local young adults will re-evaluate the trade and choose this industry as the first choice option.

Recommendations

To increase greater interest amongst the Singapore hospitality students, a number of measures can be taken. Firstly, the industry would need greater credibility and professionalism. The Singapore Tourism Board should engage the hospitality and tourism associations, such as the Singapore Hotel Association, Association of Room Division Executives, Association of Attractions, Clef D'or, Singapore Association of Housekeeper etc. to take more proactive steps in getting involved with the hotels, polytechnics and the public.

They should do road shows, engage polytechnics as guest speakers, organise more seminars for industrial practitioners etc.

These associations should also provide and sponsor certifications for their staff through external bodies such as the Educational Institute, American Hotel and Lodging Association. By doing so, it increase personal pride amongst the staff. Likewise, it will increase employee knowledge and skill set. The sponsorship of such training can also be used to bond and retain workers in a quid-pro-quo relationship.

Hospitality and tourism companies should also play more emphasis on work-life balance and retention strategies. According to Deery (2008), employees who feel that their work-life is out of sync will definitely consider leaving and will not display corporate citizenship towards their employers. Nowadays with many hospitality firms advocating a 5-day work-week, companies that are still practising a 6-day work-week should follow suit, lest they risk staff leaving for other industries and establishments. Moreover, hospitality firms should take the initiative to follow government pro-work-life programs such as working from home, having 4-day work weeks, flexible schedules and 'family-dinner days' programmes.
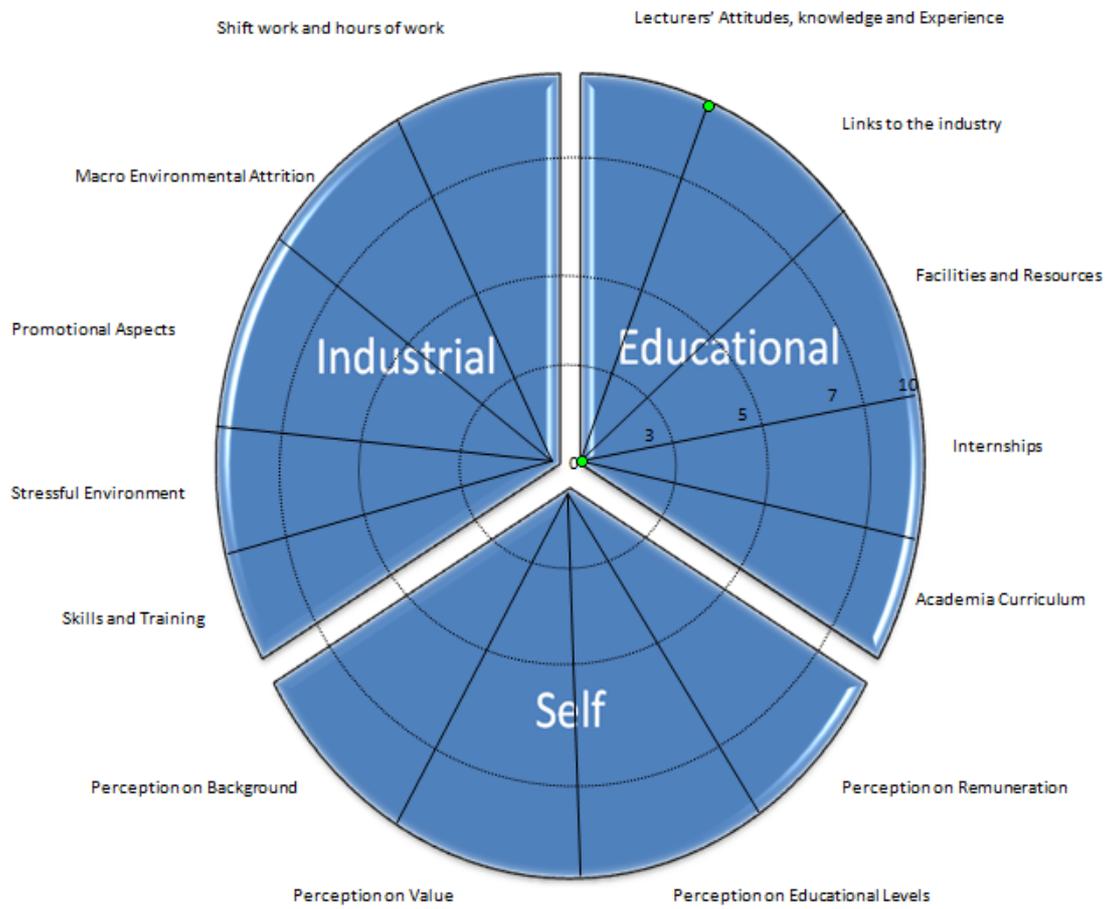
On an educational perspective, course and programme managers should remain relevant to the industry. They should hire more professionals from newer tourism sectors, such as from revenue management, gaming and theme-park management. These professionals will be able to bring a wealth of knowledge to keep student interest high and the curriculum relevant rather than from traditional subjects such as food and beverage and housekeeping. Academic course managers should also have industrial practitioners to vet their subject content to confirm relevancy to the industry. They should also encourage better collaboration between industrial partners and the polytechnics in terms of the alignment of student assignments to industrial events and projects. Academia should also be sent on more industrial attachments to prevent encapsulation and to stay current.

As there is very little research done in the area of attitudes, perceptions and retention of students joining the workforce, the Ministry of Manpower, together with the Singapore Tourism Board could commission a formal research to delve further and obtain quantitative data on the reasons why students are declined to join the hospitality and tourism industry.

Finally, there is a shortage of 'local industrial heroes' within the industry. (M.A. Kiffly, personal communications, July 15, 2010) 'Local industrial heroes' are industrial practitioners who have reached the pinnacle of their career and are contributing back to the industry. An example of a local hero would be Jennie Chua, former President and CEO of Raffles International and Ascott. Most CEOs and General Managers of hospitality firms in Singapore are expatriates. These phenomena results in student have little faith that they can climb to such a position in their home country. The Singapore Manpower Ministry should curtail the number of expatriates holding such positions and have Singapore Tourism Board and Singapore Hotel Association promote local hoteliers and practitioners so that they can be seen as role models and for future students to emulate.

Appendix A

Model of Attrition and Interest

Shift work and hours of work

Lecturers' Attitudes, knowledge and Experience

Macro Environmental Attrition

Links to the industry

Promotional Aspects

Facilities and Resources

Industrial

Educational

10

7

Stressful Environment

5

Internships

3

Skills and Training

0

Academia Curriculum

Self

Perception on Background

Perception on Remuneration

Perception on Value

Perception on Educational Levels

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