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Identification of Industry Needs for Baccalaureate Hospitality Graduates: A Delphi Study

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IDENTIFICATION OF INDUSTRY NEEDS FOR BACCALAUREATE HOSPITALITY GRADUATES:
A DELPHI STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) expected of students graduating from baccalaureate institutions conferring four-year degrees in hospitality management. This study provided a confidential online forum, using Delphi methodology, to identify needed KSAs. Findings of this study suggest the top five KSAs students graduating from baccalaureate programs in hospitality management need for success in the industry are: good communication skills (oral), delivery of exceptional and consistent customer service, a commitment to high performance, people skills, and the ability to multi-task.

Key Words: hospitality curriculum, Delphi technique, hospitality KSAs

INTRODUCTION

The first organized program for the hospitality industry was a hotel management curriculum at the first hotel school established in 1922 at Cornell University in Ithaca New York (McIntosh 1992). The second program followed five years later with the establishment of a similar program at Michigan State University in East Lansing. In the 1930s programs commenced at Denver University in Colorado, and University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and Washington State University in Pullman, Washington. According to Fletcher (1991) the greatest expansion of programs in hospitality education occurred at the community colleges.

With the exception of a few four year programs, hospitality education prior to 1950 concentrated on skills training. Program foundations were based on the theorists such as Charles Prosser and John Dewey. Prosser (1913) noted that “successful...education required the combining of two elements: (1) practice and thinking about the practice, and (2) doing and thinking about the doing” (Gordon 1999). Dewey (1916) advocated that education needed to not only have technical skill set outcomes, but to also expose students to education outcomes to foster the growth of democratic-minded citizens. As the industry expanded in the United States, the need for more qualified employees grew and educational efforts in the 1950s and 60s focused on the associate degree which emphasized continued operational knowledge, along with some business skills. In the 1970s and 80s as the industry rapidly evolved, reflecting the need for a highly skilled workforce, there was a sharp increase in the number of four-year programs. In the 1990s the industry continued to increase in complexity and so did the demand for knowledgeable and highly skilled managers with graduate degrees (Fletcher 1991).

The hospitality industry has experienced tremendous growth both in size and complexity during the latter half of the twentieth century to the present. That growth in turn has fuelled a dramatic increase in the number and

types of hospitality management programs at two and four-year colleges in the United States (Goodman & Sprague 1991; Jafari 1997; Riegel & Dallas 1999; Ritchie 1995). The number of four-year programs has exceeded 150. When two year programs are included, the number is well over 250 (Pavesic 1993).

Additionally, changes in the work environment, increased competition, a demanding and increasingly sophisticated clientele, advances in technology, and the changing expectations of investors, employers, and employees have profoundly impacted education and training as it relates to the industry (Breiter & Clements 1996; International Labor Organization 2001).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As the industry continues to evolve, program curricula have come under increasing scrutiny from key stakeholders namely industry professionals, educators, alumni, and students (Casado 2003; Lefever & Withiam 1998; Pavesic 1993; Tribe 2002). Industry dimensions such as eco-tourism, sustainability, and international expansion, to name a few have brought new challenges to hospitality curricula. Two other possible reasons have been advanced for this increased attention: (1) the need to satisfy institutional and industry demands (Martin, Ryan, Rena, & Regna 2002), and (2) the industry as an academic discipline is relatively young compared to other established disciplines (Nelson & Dopson 2001).

The hospitality industry can be divided into different segments such as by the type of food and/or services provided. Some segments can be further subdivided. For example, restaurants are usually segmented into three categories: quick service, casual dining, and fine dining (along with the emerging segment of fast casual). The lodging segment can be subdivided into budget/economy hotels, mid-scale hotels, and luxury hotels. Other hospitality industry segments include food and beverage manufacturing and suppliers, onsite food services, travel and tourism, event and meeting planning, sports and entertainment, catering, and education. To meet the challenge brought on by the proliferation of schools targeting segments of the hospitality industry, hospitality education programs must update their education curricula, Michael Haywood (1989) wrote:

Education must adapt itself and its role in order to retain its effectiveness. In other words, educators must explore the prospects for educational design that enables students to prepare for continuing learning participation in the transformation of their personal lives, their careers, and their society. That specific knowledge and skills acquired through formal hospitality and tourism education are becoming less important than a willingness and ability to seek new knowledge and understanding. We need new strategies to help us understand the environment and the complex changes that are occurring, and we are unlikely to find them in the established maps of knowledge that now characterize our discipline (p. 260).

There are a wide range of differences in regard to enrollment, program emphasis, geographic location, student population, and tradition of four-year hospitality/tourism programs (Pavesic 1984). Due to restrictions of hospitality management curriculum brought on by class size, limited course offerings, or the department in which the bachelor's degree is housed, a standardized model, or set of standardized learning outcomes, for hospitality curriculum does not exist. If the perceptions of the industry practitioners are that students are not adequately prepared for the dynamic industry of hospitality, the credibility of hospitality education can and should be questioned.

Further, there are different perceptions of areas of needed knowledge and skills outcomes for the hospitality industry of graduates from four-year post-secondary institutions. While some baccalaureate curriculum is designed to teach applications of perceived skills needed to help students secure their post-graduate initial jobs in the hospitality industry, other post-secondary institutions have traditionally offered curriculum that is inclusive of

theoretical principles of hospitality operations and management, which will in turn better prepare the graduate for subsequent jobs and promotions.

One accepted curriculum model invites a more academic approach to course offerings while the other equally accepted model teaches students the more technical course subjects. These models echo the different paradigms of the industry. While some hospitality organizations desire bachelors-degree graduating students to possess the ability to critically analyze operations of management, other hospitality organizations want students who have minimal need for additional technical skills training. Therefore, the problem exists that no agreed upon curriculum model for hospitality management is available presently, or for the near future, which responds to industry needs.

There has been a myriad of research in regard to essential competencies that are required of the hospitality industry. The literature review for this study focused on knowledge, skills, and ability competencies for middle-managers of full-service hotels, consisting of a minimum of 100 rooms. One such study was offered by Kay and Russette (2000). Their research provided a summary of three meta-analysis studies of competencies required for all managers as well as some specific to particular job descriptions. Work by Tas (1988) researched general manager-trainee competencies from a hotel-industry perspective. Research by Okeiyi, Finley, and Postel (1994) reported on entry-level food and beverage competencies from the view points of educators, employers, and students. In the mid 1990s, Tas and his colleagues studied competencies desired from management trainees (1996).

All three of the studies included a survey with a five-point Likert-type scale as the research means. Kay and Russette (2000) listed the six top competencies of Tas' 1988 research: (1) Manages guest problems with understanding and sensitivity, (2) Maintains professional and ethical standards in the work environment, (3a) demonstrates professional appearance and poise, (3b) communicates effectively both in writing and orally, (4) develops positive customer relations, and (5) strives to achieve positive working relations with employees based on perception of work interaction. Okeiyi's team, as reported by Kay and Russette (2000) provided the top three competencies as (1) develops positive customer relations, (2) human relations, and (3) motivation principles. In the 1996 research by Tas, *et al.*, Kay and Russette (2000), listed the competencies of (1) interacts smoothly with a wide variety of people and (2) operates effectively and calmly under pressure or in crisis situations.

Another competency study was conducted by Ashley, *et al.* (1995), in which the University of Central Florida's hospitality-management department invited twenty-five industry executives to be on an advisory committee. The executives participated in a four -hour brainstorming session to help identify the skills, knowledge areas and competencies critical for baccalaureate-level employees. The top-ten categories included general management knowledge rather than specific technical skills. Ranked in descending order, the top categories were (1) people skills, (2) creative-thinking ability, (3) financial skills, (4) communication skills (for both written and oral presentations), (5) developing a service orientation, (6) total quality management, (7), problem-identification and problem-solving skills, (8) listening skills, (9) customer-feedback skills, and (10) individual and system-wide computer skills.

Lefever and Withiam (1998) in a survey of how the hospitality industry perceives hospitality curriculum found the industry feels strongly that educators need firsthand industry experience. The summary of their survey included the statement, "perhaps the greatest lesson from the questionnaire is that hospitality practitioners would like academe to produce students who not only have appropriate technical ability, but who have a realistic view of the industry" (p. 75).

Further, Kay and Moncarz (2004) provide recent research of knowledge, skills, and abilities for lodging management and compare KSAs that distinguish senior-level executives from their subordinate middle-level counterparts. Their findings show that "...early research on KSAs for lodging managers suggested that leadership and interpersonal skills are essential for managerial success and represented the highest-rated management skills

recognized by hospitality professionals” (p. 286). Those findings further strengthen the need for this research. Significant to the Kay and Moncarz (2004) research was the result of a list of 248 management KSAs. From the list, four domains were created: (1) human resources management, (2) information technology, (3) financial management, and (4) marketing.

Arguably, information technology can be considered more technical while human resources management, financial management, and marketing can be considered more academic. A summary of the competency studies in the scale development is offered. Table 1 represents individual empirical knowledge, skills, and abilities pertinent to hospitality managers analyzed by hospitality managers as reported by Kay and Moncarz (2004). As shown by the table, many of the surveys indicate that all of the four domains were required for management success, while other studies indicate that either more technical or more academic skills are necessary for some of the four domains. The summary of the KSA competency studies highlight continued debate as to the necessary current competencies required for hospitality managers.

Table 1
Individual Empirical Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSA) Studies

<i>Cite</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>Sample Unit</i>		<i>KSA Domain Studied</i>			
		<i>Collection</i>	<i>Analysis</i>	<i>HRM</i>	<i>FM</i>	<i>MKT</i>	<i>IT</i>
Bart and Chen (2001)	49	Hospitality manager	Entry hospitality manager	X			
Breiter & Clements (1996)	11	Hospitality manager	Hospitality manager	X	X	X	X
Brownell (1992)	91	General manager	General manager	X			
Christou and Eaton (2002)	91	General manager	Entry hotel manager	X		X	
Geisser and Martin (1998)	42	Hospitality manager	Entry hotel manager	X			
Getty, Tas, and Getty (1990)	39	Hospitality manager	Entry hotel manager	X	X	X	X
Hsu (1995)	121	Hospitality manager	Hospitality manager				X
Hsu and Gregory (1995)	30	Hospitality manager	Entry hospitality manager	X	X	X	
Kay and Russette (2000)	52	Hospitality manager	Middle hospitality manager	X	X	X	
Ladkin & Juwaheer (2000)	16	Senior hotel manager	Lodging manager	X	X	X	
Nelson and Dopson (2001)	85	Hospitality manager	Entry hospitality manager	X	X	X	X
Okeiyi, <i>et al</i> (1994)	20	Food-services manager	Entry hospitality manager	X	X	X	X
Partlow (1990)	52	Hospitality manager	Hospitality manager	X	X	X	
Stu <i>et al</i> (1997)	90	Hospitality manager	Entry hospitality manager	X	X	X	X
Tas <i>et al</i> (1996)	81	Lodging manager	Entry property manager	X			

Woods <i>et al</i> (1998)	77	General manager	General manager	X	X	X
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Note: HRM = human resources management; FM = financial management; MKT = marketing; IT = information technology

Source: Kay and Moncarz (2004)

Currently, there are different perceptions of areas of needed knowledge and skills outcomes for the hospitality industry of graduates from four-year post-secondary institutions. Some have argued that tourism and hospitality programs are too technically oriented or what is termed “vocalization” of the curriculum (Jafari and Ritchie 1981; Pavesic 1993). Grubb and Lazerson (2005) concluded that a narrow technical curriculum “undermines genuine occupational preparation and also impoverishes the intellectual and civic roles that higher education can play” (p. 16). A counter argument to a highly technical curriculum is offered by Woods (2003) and Chipkin (2004), who see the curriculum as being too theoretical. This argument is also supported by Kay and Rusette (2000) and Casado (2003) who also highlight the importance of technical and operational courses. To complicate the argument even more, others call for an undergraduate curriculum that is broad in scope, and teaches concepts and principles that can be applied across industry segments which can serve as a base for lifelong living (Pavesic 1993; Nelson & Dopson 2001; Ritchie 1995). These perceptions echo the different paradigms of the industry. While some hospitality organizations desire bachelor-degree graduating students to possess the ability to critically analyze operations of management, other hospitality organizations want students who have minimal need for additional technical skills training.

The research in this study was conducted using the Delphi technique to identify the KSAs needed for employees entering employment into management positions in the hospitality industry. The Delphi technique is defined as “a group process involving an interaction between the researcher and a group of identified experts on a specific topic or topics, usually through a series of questionnaires” (Skutsch & Hall 1973).

The Delphi method originated in the 1950s as the name for an Air Force-sponsored project conducted by the Rand Corporation. Using seven experts on atomic warfare to gather opinions for the military, Dalkey and Helmer (1962) were the first known to use the Delphi procedure. Skutsch and Hall (1973) identified the Delphi as a method for gaining judgments on complex matters where precise matters are unavailable. According to Linstone and Turoff (1975), “Delphi may be characterized as a method for structuring a group communication process so that the process is effective in allowing a group of individuals, as a whole, to deal with a complex problem” (p.3). It is thought to be a structured process that involves collecting and synthesizing knowledge from a panel of experts.

Linstone and Turoff (1975) stated two circumstances where the Delphi technique is most appropriate: (a) “the problem does not lend itself to precise analytical techniques but can benefit from subjective judgments on a collective basis and (b) individuals who need to interact cannot be brought together in a face-to-face exchange because of time or cost constraints” (p. 275). Both of these circumstances are applicable to the ambiguity found in post-secondary hospitality management curricula.

Dalkey (1967) has identified the following basic characteristics of the Delphi technique:

1. Anonymity-the use of questionnaires or other communication where expressed responses are not identified as being from specific members of the panel allows for anonymity.
2. Controlled feedback from the interaction-Controlled feedback allows interaction with a large reduction in discord among panel members. Interaction consists of allowing interaction among group members in several stages, with the results of the previous stage summarized and group members asked to reevaluate their answers as compared to the thinking of the group.

3. Statistical group response-the group opinion is defined as a statistical average of the final opinions of the individual members, with the opinion of every group member reflected in the final group response. (pp. 8-9).

During the same period as Dalkey (1967) was identifying the basic characteristics of the Delphi technique, Helmer (1967) supported the validity and reliability of the technique as an acceptable method of data collection from an identified group. Several steps, as identified by Brooks (1979), were involved in using the Delphi technique. Brooks also discovered that three rounds were enough to gain consensus of opinion, with a fourth round eliciting very little change.

This study was dependent on one question relating to the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities employees must have for successful employment in the hospitality industry: According to industry experts, what are the required knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) that graduates from four year post-secondary institutions currently need to possess for success in the hospitality industry?

METHODOLOGY

The research procedure consisted of a three-round Delphi to gain consensus on the above-stated research questions. The process of the Delphi technique consists of the following steps, as offered by Wilhelm (2001):

1. Question definition
2. Delphi panel creation
3. First-round questionnaire: Initial subject consideration
4. First-round analysis: data synthesis
5. Second-round questionnaire: Subject exploration.
6. Second-round analysis: data synthesis
7. Third-round questionnaire: Consensus or conclusion reaching
8. Third-round analysis: Conclusion drawing.
9. Final report preparation (pp. 13-21)

The above steps include three rounds of questionnaires. Those processes were outlined by Pfeiffer (1968):

1. The first questionnaire which is sent to the panel of experts may ask for a list of opinions involving experiences and judgments, a list of predictions, and a list of recommended activities.
2. On the second round, a copy of the collective list is sent to each expert and the expert is asked to rate or evaluate each item by some criterion of importance.
3. The third questionnaire includes the list, the ratings indicated, and the consensus, if one is reached. The experts are asked to either revise their opinions or discuss reasons for not coming to consensus with the group.

This Delphi study consisted of three rounds and 22 leading experts in hospitality management who were selected "because the success of the Delphi relies on informed opinion," not random selection (p. 1050). Hence, a possibility to look to professional associations as an aid to panel selection resulted in a heterogeneous rather than homogeneous groups and as noted by Powell (2003), "produce a higher proportion of high quality, highly acceptable solutions" (p. 370).

Selection of the panel experts was given careful consideration. National experts in the field were utilized through contact as a member of The American Hotel and Lodging (AHLA) Educational Institute's Education Industry-Liaison committee, as well as advisory board members of a hospitality management program at a northwest college. The experts included General Managers and Human Resource Directors from different geographical

locations who represented hotels with at least 150 rooms and offered at least one full-service restaurant and lounge and guest meeting facilities. Panelists were contacted by telephone and asked if they would be willing to serve as a participant in the study. During the telephone conversation, each panelist was given a brief description of the study, and asked if they felt confident to identify expected knowledge, skills, and abilities of graduates with baccalaureate degrees in hospitality management.

A letter of consent followed by a formal letter of invitation was sent via electronic mail to chosen panel members. Included within the letter was a brief description of the research process, the study timeline, and a consent form for panelists.

The first round was an open-ended instrument. Pfeiffer (1968), in outlining the basic Delphi procedure, supported the use of the open-ended questionnaire on the first round. Each panel member was asked to respond to the following question: From your experience and observation, what are the required knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that graduates from four-year post-secondary institutions currently need to possess for success in the hospitality industry? Additionally, the panel was asked to provide comments.

Responses to the first round were used to formulate statements for the second wave of the study. The researcher recorded individual responses to the question and the identifying number code of each panelist. The responses were sorted qualitatively with similar themes being grouped together. All responses were reviewed to avoid careless or incomplete responses, or those caused by misinterpretations of the instructions.

The compiled responses from the Delphi I instrument were listed under the appropriate question. Panelists received a short note and a link to a web page that allowed them to rate all of the received responses of the first wave on a Likert-type scale of strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree. The web page was used to tally panelists' responses. Coding of the responses was assigned by numbers, with "1-strongly disagree," "2-disagree," "3-neutral," "4-agree," and "5-strongly agree." Panelist members had the opportunity to make comments at the bottom of the survey.

Upon receiving the results of the Delphi II, the responses of individuals to each item under the appropriate statement were recorded. Recorded data included the individual response to each item on the instrument.

After all responses were received, the mean and standard deviation were calculated for each item. Along with the mean and standard deviation, the percentage of responses from the two most favorable categories on the scale were calculated. The percentage representing panelists who chose "agree" or "strongly agree" to each KSA question was noted. For the purpose of forming consensus, items with a mean of less than 4.0 were eliminated from further consideration. Development of the Delphi III instrument was based on the responses received on the Delphi II. The mean, standard deviation, and the percentage of responses in the two most favorable categories of the scale were reported to all panelists on the Delphi III instrument.

All remaining items from the Delphi II were included on the Delphi III instrument. Items that had a mean of less than 4.0 were deleted from further consideration. Those deleted items were shown with a line drawn through them. The mean and standard deviation were reported for the deleted items. The same five-point Likert-type scale used on the Delphi II became a part of the Delphi III instrument.

For Delphi III, panelists received a short note and a link to a web page that allowed them to rate all of the received responses of Delphi II on the same five-point Likert-type scale. Individual responses for each item under each of the research questions were recorded in a data spreadsheet. Recorded data included the individual response to each item on the instrument. After all of the instruments were returned, the mean and standard deviation were calculated. Items not meeting the same majority criterion used in Delphi II were deleted. The remaining items were

compiled into a comprehensive list of knowledge, skills, and abilities that graduates from four-year post-secondary institutions currently need to possess for success in the hospitality industry.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Panelists produced 167 KSAs needed by bachelors-degree graduates to be successful in the hospitality industry. When similar responses were combined, forty-two KSAs were identified, as illustrated by Table 2. Some KSAs were identified by several panelists, while other characteristics were listed only once.

Table 2
Results of Delphi I: From your experience and observation, what are the required knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that graduates from four year post-secondary institutions currently need to possess for success in the hospitality industry?

Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSAs)
1. Sales skills
2. Strong analytical skills
3. Good oral communication skills
4. Ability to multi-task
5. People (HR) skills
6. Ability to interpret a financial statement and identify corrective action steps
7. Create a market plan that can be introduced
8. How to participate in effective meetings
9. Technology knowledge
10. Coaching and counseling staff
11. Delivering exceptional and consistent customer service
12. Practical sales training
13. Making cultural diversity real
14. Professional development
15. Desire to learn and develop management skills
16. Desire to take on additional responsibilities
17. Demonstrated sense of responsibilities
18. General hotel operations
19. Develop an effective working relationship with fellow associates, managers, outside representatives, and agencies
20. Communication skills (professional writing and email etiquette)
21. Computer knowledge (Microsoft Office Suite)
22. Team building
23. Problem solving
24. Conflict management
25. Performance management
26. Employment law
27. Ability to handle change creatively and effectively
28. Ability to train and motivate others
29. Knowledge of economics and business cycles
30. Organizational development
31. Consumer behavior
32. Restaurant operations
33. Effective influence skills

34. Ability to use hotel systems software applications
35. E-commerce marketing skills
36. Knowledge of purchasing
37. Knowledge of inventory controls
38. Knowledge of equipment
39. Knowledge of governmental regulations and safety standards (OSHA, EPA, ADA, EEO)
40. Professional business acumen (professional grooming and appearance)
41. Ability to prioritize
42. Commitment to high performance

Many of the KSAs, identified by several members of the panel, were identified as general management knowledge rather than specific technical skills. Categories noted from the Delphi I results were identified in ten broad categories by the researcher for analysis purposes:

1. Commitment to industry excellence
2. Employee management skills
3. Operational knowledge and experience
4. Sales and marketing skills
5. Human relationship skills
6. Information technology skills
7. Communication skills
8. Ability to create and maintain a customer service environment
9. Analytical thinking ability
10. Financial skills

One of the panelists provided a synopsis of needed KSAs of graduates by offering:

...we're looking for folks who will relocate (this is a huge issue these days - college students always say they can [relocate] then rarely will when push comes to shove); we're looking for the personality - customer service mentality - our mission statement demands ...personalized, exuberant service..., we're looking for students that have had actual work experience - not the college deli or their sorority/fraternity - real hard work experience, preferably in a hotel so they know exactly what it is like; we're looking for students that have a demonstrated sense of responsibility (had to pay for their schooling - or at least some part of it - themselves, for example) and a demonstrated ability to multi-task, prioritize and manage their time efficiently for the highest levels of productivity.

Another panelist commented on the perceived changes of the hospitality industry by writing:

For many years, the hospitality industry seemed to operate with the stigma that it was not quite a real business. Today, it is critical for graduates coming into the hospitality industry to have a full business education, with training in economics and business cycles, finance and accounting, human resources and organizational development and marketing and consumer behavior.

The Delphi II instrument was developed from the compiled responses of the Delphi I. The forty-two KSAs from Delphi I were randomly listed under the corresponding question and a five-point Likert-type scale was added to each KSA. The rating scale remained the same. Panelists were also asked to provide any additional comments.

A link to the online survey that was used was sent in an email message to the twenty-two panelists. Although varied in their overall responses (Table 3), all panelists strongly agreed that good communication skills

(oral) (Mean: 5.0, SD: .00, Mode: 5) was the most vital of the KSAs that graduates from four year post-secondary institutions currently need for success in the hospitality industry.

Table 3
Results of Delphi II: Means, Standard Deviations, and Mode from panelists who rated the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSA's) that graduates from four year post-secondary institutions currently need to possess for success in the hospitality industry

KSA's	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Mode</u>
1. Sales skills	22	4.25	.87	4
2. Strong analytical skills	22	4.58	.52	5
3. Good communication skills (oral)	22	5.00	.00	5
4. Ability to multi-task	22	4.67	.49	5
5. People (HR) skills	22	4.83	.39	5
6. Ability to interpret a financial statement and identify corrective action steps	22	4.33	.49	4
7. Create a market plan that can be introduced	22	3.92	.67	4
8. How to participate in effective meetings	22	4.25	.62	4
9. Technology knowledge	22	4.17	.58	4
10. Coaching and counseling staff	21	4.55	.52	5
11. Delivering exceptional and consistent customer service	22	4.75	.45	5
12. Practical sales training	22	3.92	.79	3
13. Making cultural diversity real	22	3.92	.67	4
14. Professional development	22	4.09	.54	4
15. Desire to learn and develop management skills	22	4.58	.67	5
16. Desire to take on additional responsibilities	22	4.58	.52	5
17. Demonstrated sense of responsibilities	22	4.58	.52	5
18. General hotel operations	22	4.00	.43	4
19. Develop an effective working relationship with fellow associates, managers, outside representatives, and agencies	22	4.50	.52	4
20. Communication skills (including professional writing and email etiquette)	22	4.58	.52	4
21. Computer knowledge (Microsoft Office Suite)	22	4.08	.29	4
22. Team building	22	4.33	.65	4
23. Problem solving	22	4.50	.52	4
24. Conflict management	22	4.42	.52	4
25. Performance management	22	4.17	.58	4
26. Employment law	22	3.67	.65	3
27. Ability to handle change creatively & effectively	22	4.50	.52	4
28. Ability to train and motivate others	22	4.25	.62	4
30. Organizational development	22	3.92	.52	4
31. Consumer behavior	21	3.91	.54	4
32. Restaurant operations	22	3.92	.52	4
33. Effective influence skills	22	4.00	.43	4
34. Ability to use hotel systems software applications	22	3.75	.62	4
35. E-commerce marketing skills	22	3.67	.78	3
36. Knowledge of purchasing	22	3.75	.62	4
37. Knowledge of inventory controls	22	4.08	.67	4
38. Knowledge of equipment	22	3.58	.79	4

39. Knowledge of governmental regulations and safety standards (OSHA, EPA, ADA, EEO)	22	3.67	.78	3
40. Professional business acumen (professional grooming and appearance)	22	4.45	.52	4
41. Ability to prioritize	22	4.42	.52	4
42. Commitment to high performance	22	4.75	.45	5

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree

The Delphi III instrument was developed from the compiled responses and included the mean, standard deviation and mode of the Delphi II survey. Using the same rating scale from the Delphi II instrument, panelists were asked to rate only those items with a mean of 4.00 or greater. Those items that did not meet the criterion were shown on the Delphi III instrument with the descriptive statistics and a line drawn through them. Panelists were also asked to provide any additional comments.

A link to the online survey that was used was sent in an email message to the twenty-two panelists. In Delphi III panelists continued to report and agree that good communication skills (oral) (Mean: 5.0, SD: .30, Mode: 5) were required KSAs of graduates from four year post-secondary programs in hospitality management for success in the hospitality industry. Table 4 includes the ratings and descriptive statistics in rank order of all of Delphi III survey results.

Table 4
Results of Delphi III: Means, Standard Deviations, and Mode in ranked order from panelists who rated the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA's) that graduates from four year post-secondary institutions currently need to possess for success in the hospitality industry

KSAs	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Mode</u>
1. Good communication skills (oral)	20	4.91	.30	5
2. Delivering exceptional and consistent customer service	20	4.82	.40	5
3. Commitment to high performance	20	4.82	.40	5
4. People (HR) skills	20	4.55	.52	5
5. Ability to multi-task	20	4.52	.68	5
6. Desire to learn and develop management skills	20	4.52	.68	5
7. Communication skills (including professional writing and email etiquette)	20	4.50	.50	4
8. Problem solving	20	4.41	.66	4
9. Strong analytical skills	20	4.36	.50	4
10. Desire to take on additional responsibilities	20	4.32	.64	4
11. Ability to prioritize	20	4.32	.64	4
12. Demonstrated sense of responsibilities	20	4.23	.68	4
13. Professional business acumen (professional grooming and appearance)	20	4.23	.41	4
14. Sales skills	20	4.14	.71	4
15. Coaching and counseling staff	20	4.14	.71	4
16. Computer knowledge (Microsoft Office Suite)	20	4.11	.70	4

17. Conflict management	20	4.11	.70	4
18. Ability to train and motivate others	20	4.09	.70	4
19. Develop an effective working relationship with fellow associates, managers, outside representatives, and agencies	20	4.05	1.01	4
20. Ability to interpret a financial statement and identify corrective action steps	20	3.98	.60	4
21. How to participate in effective meetings	20	3.93	.55	4
22. Performance management	20	3.91	.83	4
23. Ability to handle change creatively & effectively	20	3.91	.54	4
24. Effective influence skills	20	3.86	.64	4
25. Team building				
26. Knowledge of economics and business cycles	20	3.73	.65	4
27. Technology knowledge	20	3.73	.65	4
28. Knowledge of inventory controls	20	3.57	.55	4
29. Professional development	20	3.57	.84	4
30. General hotel operations	20	4.11	.70	4

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree

The implications associated with the findings of this study may be useful for both policymakers associated with institutions conferring baccalaureate degrees in hospitality management and for the hospitality industry. For colleges and universities offering baccalaureate degrees in hospitality management, curriculum design, outcome identification, and assessment practices aligned with the findings from this study should be considered. This study demonstrates the importance for educational institutions to continue to form working relationships with the hospitality industry and conversely, a need for the hospitality industry to form working partnerships with colleges and universities conferring baccalaureate degrees in hospitality management. From the industry perspective, human resource professionals and general managers could measure the readiness of graduates from specific baccalaureate programs which includes curriculum outcomes that align with KSAs needed for success in the hospitality industry.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the results of this study's findings provide substance for estimable discussion, it is important to recognize that the implications are limited. This research was typical of a Delphi study as it drew data from a small expert panel and is consistent with an acceptable number of members according to Delphi literature (Wilhelm 2001). While the overall panel size consisted of twenty-two members, it is notable that at the time the study was made, fourteen members were general managers and the remaining eight members were either human resource directors or certified trainers. The capacity of the panel members included independent and regional human resource directors, and independent and well known brand hotel enterprises. The panel, while representative of many national chains and independents, was heavily comprised of general managers or human resource directors from the northwestern portion of the United States. Attention was not paid to the gender, ethnicity, or educational and professional background of the panelists. The scope of the properties, in relationship to the panelists, and relative to total rooms, revenue, or other specific property factors were not considered beyond full service hotels which offer a minimum of one hundred guest rooms.

While response rates were very high, there may have been a slight loss of momentum by the expert panel to respond to Delphi III due to two factors. Linstone & Turoff (1975), in their discussion of frequent problems encountered by researchers using the Delphi methodology, warned of the attrition by the third round of the Delphi study. A contributing factor to what appeared to be a loss of momentum of the experts, may have been the state of

the United States economy, which drove the fact that all employees of the hotel business were feeling the pressure of a comparable down-turn in business. In a follow-up phone call to a panelist who had not responded to the Delphi III survey within the time allotted, one panelist commented:

While I understand the nature of your study, and the importance of that study to your research, I am overwhelmed by not having as many people in mid-level management positions due to economic factors. I can promise I will respond to your study as I have done in the past, but I don't think I will be able to put the response time in as I did with the other two surveys.

General Managers and Human Resource Directors seemed not to have the same amount of time to respond to Delphi III as they did with the other two rounds.

The arena for further research in this area continues to be broad. The purpose of this study was to find consensus among hospitality management stakeholders in regard to identification of current knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) expected of graduates from four-year baccalaureate degree programs. Research related to exploring the methodology of delivering KSAs specific to this study into hospitality curricula and a suggested curriculum model should be continued.

Research to directly extend this study and make the findings more robust would be to facilitate a series of focus groups; face-to-face interviews drawn from the expert panel in an attempt to more fully discover rationales for responses would be of interest. It may also be beneficial to dissect the sampling population by components such as the number of years in the industry of the panelists, educational background of the expert panelists, and age and gender of the panelists. Also, further research could be conducted with panelists who represent a balance of type of properties in regard to independent and corporate ownerships. Conducting research in regard to KSAs required for success in global versus domestic operations would also be of interest.

One panelist, who placed culpability on the post-secondary institutions in regard to industry awareness needed by graduates, spoke to the importance of this research by writing:

It is up to institutions to place a dose of reality into students throughout their education so they are prepared to spend one to three years after graduation in line level positions before moving into supervisory and assistant manager positions. If an institution which offers a degree in hospitality management has not instilled that thought with their graduates, in my mind, it is the fault of the institution, not the graduate.

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