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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the global economy, but no sector has been more affected than the hospitality and tourism industry (Škare et al., 2021). Due to the number of layoffs within hospitality and tourism, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of having diverse job skills and transferring them from one position to another. Even before non-Covid times, according to Workopolis (2014), more than two-thirds (69%) of all Canadians had worked in more than one field during their career. In the USA, 49% of people make a career change in their lifetime (Liu, 2019). With technology leading to automation and shifting demand across many industries (including the service-based ones), this means that an undergraduate degree that emphasizes transferrable job skills will become increasingly important. For this research, we analyzed the LinkedIn profiles of 600 graduates from hospitality and tourism (HT) programs within business schools across Canada and the USA to determine how many are currently working in the industry, and if not, what skills they had to highlight to move into another industry, and whether they changed career during COVID-19.

Literature Review

Hospitality Programs

Students can learn various concepts and skills to apply to various industries post-graduation by studying in an HT program. Hospitality program curricula contain courses related to manners and etiquette, communication skills, and leadership. Students can improve their skillset and working ability to prepare for future careers (Wang & Abukhalifeh, 2020). Moreover, the programs usually include internship or work requirements that need to be met before graduation to ensure that they have some job experience at the time of graduation. These work requirements let students gain work experience during their studies, building confidence and skills to secure employment upon graduation (Mohd et al., 2020). Although some gaps have been identified between programs and industry expectations (Millar et al., 2010), there seems to be strong agreement about the importance of developing HT graduates with strong transferrable skills to reflect the increasingly fluid nature of jobs and careers (Benckendorff & Zehrer, 2017).

The Importance of Transferable Skills

Such unexpected situations as the COVID-19 pandemic mean graduates have to offer recruiters more than just their academic skills (Muhamad, 2012). The past year has emphasized the importance of transferable skills even within HT positions. For instance, many hotel or restaurant managers were asked to take on a plethora of roles within the property. HT recruiters now state that flexibility and adaptability will be prioritized in their hiring. In good times, on average, hotel managers have had seven jobs in their careers, changing jobs approximately every three to four years (Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000). Throughout their management career track, managers strengthen their communication, human relations, accounting, presentation, and thinking skills (Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000). This showcases that such individuals can further develop their skills and gain new ones to change their jobs to a new industry and secure new ones. This consistent development of skills while making them attractive for promotion within the hospitality industry also makes individuals attractive to other industries as most of the hospitality and tourism

industry skills are connected to other sectors of the economy (Baum, 2002). As employers value such skills, individuals from the industry can highlight them when applying for other jobs in other fields. Furthermore, individuals within hospitality and tourism deal with people of different personalities daily and are quick to think of solutions when conflicts arise, so that customer experience is not impacted negatively. Such conflict resolution and leadership skills can be carried across industries. In these times when COVID-19 caused hospitality and tourism positions to be one of the first cut during the pandemic and being one of the last industries to return, many of the most qualified individuals will have found employment in other fields.

Methodology

Population and sampling: This research focused on HT graduates in business schools in the United States (N = 299) and Canada (N = 301), whose public profiles were on LinkedIn and graduated between the years 1995 - 2021. The profiles must have included an update within the past six months to indicate that they were active users.

Data collection: The data that was collected from each LinkedIn profile included:

- When the individual graduated
- If they worked in hospitality after graduation (if yes, how long)
- If they did not enter hospitality, what industry did they enter, and their position level
- The skills listed on their profile
- Past hospitality experience
- If they left during COVID-19

Analysis: The data were analyzed using NVivo to generate word clouds and counts for the industries and skills. The sample was then divided into three groups: (1) COVID graduates who graduated from 2020 – 2021 (N=157), (2) early Career Graduates (2011 – 2019 (N=332)), and (3) those who graduated earlier than 2010 and were considered established in their career (N=96). The column proportions were then compared using a Z-test with Bonferroni Method applied followed by a Chi-square analysis with Cramer's V to test for significant differences across groupings.

Results

Currently, 42.4% of the sample is working in the hospitality and tourism industry (figure 1). The top industries hospitality graduates who are not working in the industry moved into were information technology (13.1%), education (9.8%), retail/sales/logistics (6.7%) and real estate (6.3%). In the test of proportions, recent graduates were more likely to be employed in the HT industry (62.1%) versus those who were either established (39.4%) or early in their career (36.7% (Table 1)). In examining the positions closer, it was found that most of the real estate, information technology and financial services positions had a vital sales element to the positions. When added to other categories like retail, sales were the most common position outside of hospitality and tourism. Figure 2 represents the skillset exhibited by most individuals, including interpersonal, sales, tools, technological skills, and industry knowledge. The interpersonal category of skillset includes skills such as customer service, communication, leadership, and teamwork.

When divided by career level, the years of experience post-graduation was a good indicator of position level. This finding indicates that the categories developed for the analysis were indicative

of appropriate experience levels. Another indicator of appropriateness for the category groupings was found in the analysis that 63% of the most recent graduates gained employment in hospitality and tourism post-graduation compared to 80% in the early career category and 87% of those with established careers (figure 3). Further, when examining whether individuals left the hospitality and tourism industry during the pandemic, just under a third of recent graduates left versus a quarter of those who were early-career individuals and a fifth of those who were more established (figure 4). For those currently in the industry, most recent graduates are working in the food and beverage sector (40%), while those who are in the early- and established-career categories are more likely to be in the accommodations sector (43% and 45%, respectively) (figure 5).

Conclusion and Discussion

As the HT sector continues to struggle with the impacts of the pandemic, one of the salient and well-documented issues remains the labor gap: Employees leave the sector to find other and sometimes better opportunities in other sectors, leaving businesses in need of manpower and expertise. This poses a problem for workers, as well as for the industry. In a new model of hospitality workforce resilience, Martins et al. (2020, p. 3) suggested that workers be considered "service industry workers with sectors uniting to create a services industry community." This study confirms that HT graduates have transferrable skills that will allow them to move to other service sectors when needed or desired successfully. In particular, communication skills are highly demanded in multiple sectors and can benefit graduates who foster sales competencies in HT and other sectors. It is vital for HT programs to further focus and develop those transferrable skills through Work Integrated Learning, experiential courses, international exchanges, etc. Graduates will benefit from those skills to move to other sectors and grow faster in HT careers that have become knowledge and skills-intensive.

Skills and competencies are essential for the competitiveness of a country's destination (Andrades & Dimanche, 2019), and the growing labor gap, which is about frontline workers as well as supervisors and managers, will affect the sector for years to come. However, the labor gap remains the most important strategic threat for destinations and tourism businesses. The disappearance of experience, skills, and knowledge are bound to handicap further tourism businesses. As called by Della Lucia et al. (2021), a more humanistic approach to business is needed to attract and retain HT workers, and higher education establishments will continue to be essential to train the industry's future leaders to address the pandemic, climate change, sustainability, and other challenges our sector is facing.

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Table 1: Current industry employed in

Crosstab

		Graduation Group							
		COVID 2020 & 2021		Early Career - 2011 -2019		Established Career - 2010 and earlier		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Current Industry	Hospitality & Tourism	64 _a	62.1%	115 _b	36.7%	37 _b	39.4%	216	42.4%
	Education	3 _a	2.9%	26 _a	8.3%	21 _b	22.3%	50	9.8%
	Government/ Not-For-Profit	3 _a	2.9%	16 _a	5.1%	4 _a	4.3%	23	4.5%
	Human Resources/ Recruitment	0 _a	0.0%	11 _a	3.5%	2 _a	2.1%	13	2.5%
	Real Estate	3 _a	2.9%	24 _a	7.7%	5 _a	5.3%	32	6.3%
	Information Technology	11 _a	10.7%	45 _a	14.4%	11 _a	11.7%	67	13.1%
	Insurance/Financial Services	4 _a	3.9%	23 _a	7.3%	2 _a	2.1%	29	5.7%
	Retail/Sales/Logistics	9 _a	8.7%	18 _a	5.8%	7 _a	7.4%	34	6.7%
	Healthcare	3 _a	2.9%	20 _a	6.4%	3 _a	3.2%	26	5.1%
	Other	3 _a	2.9%	15 _a	4.8%	2 _a	2.1%	20	3.9%
	Total		103	100.0%	313	100.0%	94	100.0%	510

Each subscript letter denotes a subset of Graduation Group categories whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level.

Figure 1: Industries HT graduates are working in



Figure 2: The skillset hospitality graduates possess based on LinkedIn profiles



Figure 3: Current level of Employment

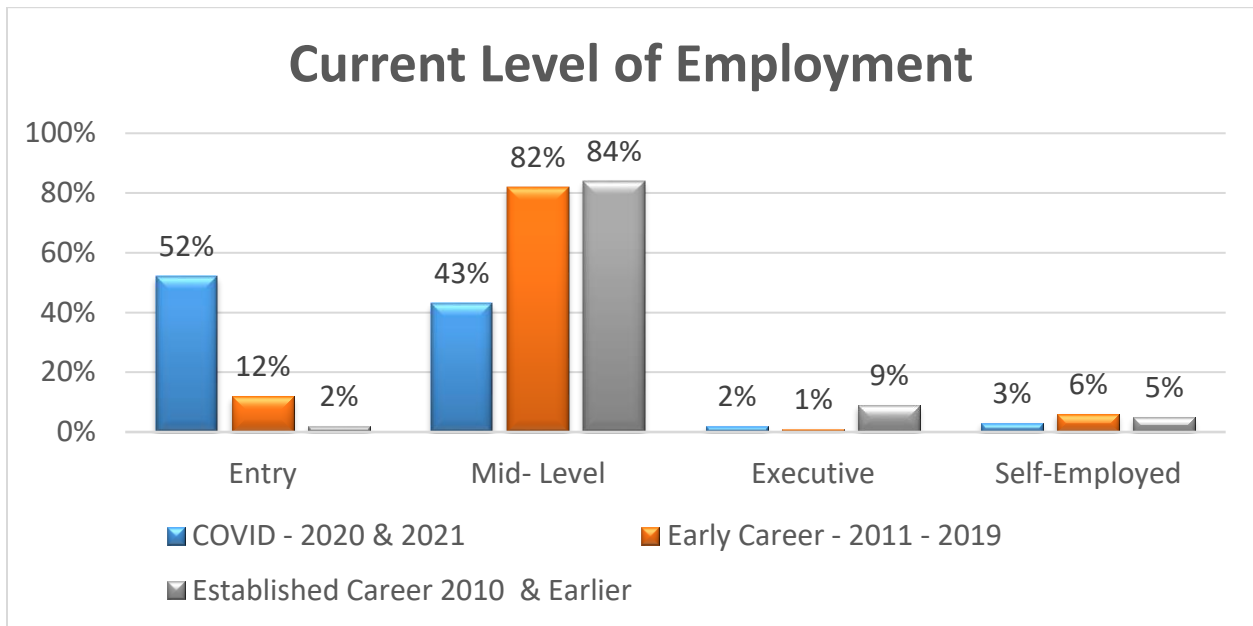


Figure 4: Left Hospitality and Tourism During COVID

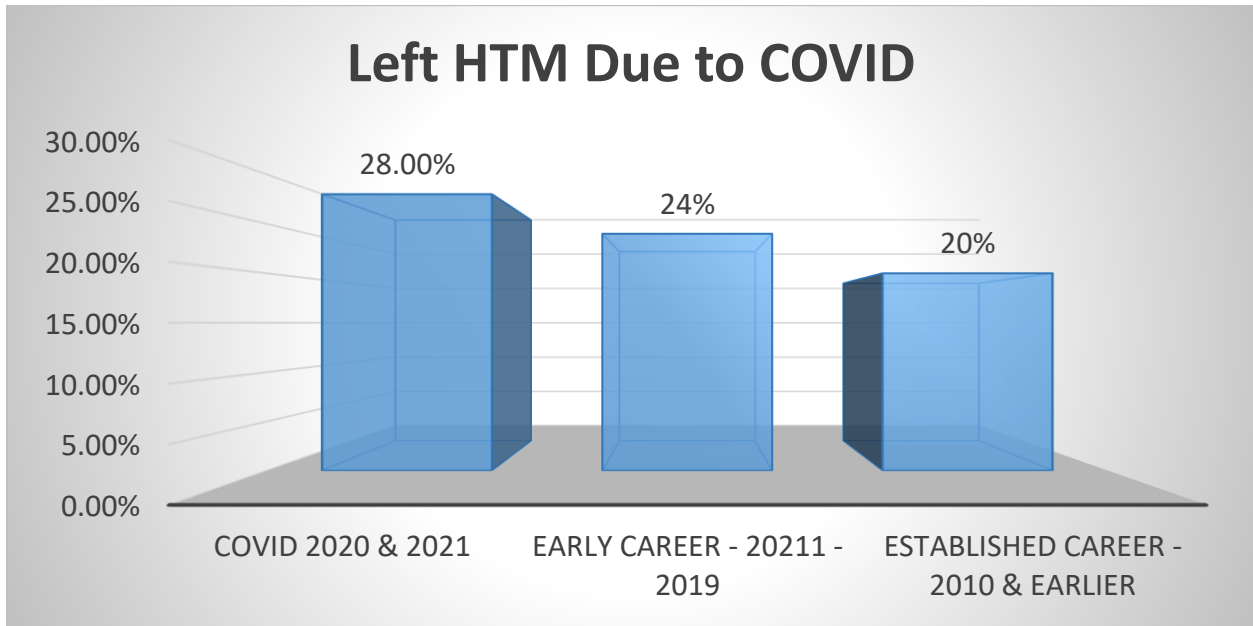


Figure 5: Sector of HTM for those currently working in the field

