PREFERRED EMPLOYABILITY ATTRIBUTES OF HOTEL AND RESTAURANT MANAGEMENT GRADUATES BY SELECT RESTAURANT MANAGERS

Abstract

This study examined the employability attributes of hotel and restaurant management graduates preferred by restaurant managers. Descriptive study was used in determining the demographic profile of the Restaurant Managers and the employability attributes of Hotel and Restaurant Management graduates. Results show that majority (62.50%) of the respondents were 21-25 years old. 22 out of 40 managers belonged to the male population while 18 managers are female. For the manager's preferred employability attributes, such as executive ability, communication, desirable persona, working enterprise, professional knowledge and adaptive skills the overall weighted mean of 3.78 was achieved which was interpreted as "very much preferred". Also, indicators showed that there was no significant difference between the managers' preferred employability attributes among HRM graduates in terms of communication, executive ability, professional knowledge, desirable persona, working enterprise and adaptive skills when grouped according to age, gender and length of experience as a manager. Furthermore, findings show that the manager's preferred employability attributes of hotel and restaurant management graduates, which were all very much preferred were: Communication Skills, Executive Ability and Professional Knowledge and Adaptive Skills. There was no significant difference between the manager's preferred employability attributes of Hotel and Restaurant Management graduates when the respondents were grouped according to profile variables.

Keywords: Employability, Employability Attribute, Hospitality Industry, Hotel and Restaurant Management Graduate,

Introduction

Nowadays, hospitality industries offer an array of job opportunities. This includes from the highest position of being a restaurant managers to chef/cook, bartender, wait staff, and busser/busboy. However, the challenge to be selected from a thousand of applicants becomes an acid test that one has to overcome. The applicant must equip himself with certain qualities that would make him be selected in the initial process of recruitment and hiring. But most importantly, the applicant must display exceptional characteristics that would make managers

decide to hire as regular employee in the restaurant. The applicant must have an idea of the skills he must possess to improve his employability.

This study was anchored on the skill theory by Kurt Fischer (2006) who sees skills developing in phases rather than stages; depending on the amount of practice and experience one has in that area of development. Skill theory provides an abstract representation of the structures of skills that emerge in cognitive development, together with a set of transformation rules that relate these structures to each other. The structures and transformation rules comprise a tool for explaining and predicting developmental sequences and synchronies from birth to young adulthood. The theory thus focuses on the organization of behavior; it is primarily a structural theory, although it is in no way incompatible with functional analyses. In this study, this theory is applied in determining the employability attributes of hotel and restaurant management graduates that can be developed in the skills that hospitality industry requires.

According to Yorke and Knight (2004) employability is seen to be influenced, amongst other things by students' self-efficacy beliefs, student's self-theories and personal qualities. They highlight that what is of critical importance is the extent to which students feel that they can "make a difference". This, importantly, not only broadens the focus to include a wider range of attributes required to be successful within employment but also includes the attributes required to manage one's career development in ways that will sustain one's employability.

Baruch College (2001) suggests that individuals assume responsibility for their on-going employability while employers provide opportunities for development. This simplistic view of employability is where individuals manage their careers across employment opportunities and organizations, who in turn offer employment as long as the person is needed.

Employability of a graduate is the predilection of the graduate to show attributes that employers predict will be required for the future successful functioning of their organization. He further suggests that graduates will need to be flexible due to the increasing number of short time contracts and part-time work in the work place (Harvey, 2000).

Yorke and Knight (2004) supported by Baruch (2001) and UKCES (2009) stated that employability is seen to be influenced, amongst other things by students' self-efficacy beliefs, student's self-theories and personal qualities. If employability is to be tackled comprehensively, universities have to reflect it in their mission statements, learning and teaching strategies, course frameworks, strategic documents and practical guidance.

Billing (2003) adds that employers want employees who are "effective communicators, problem solvers and critical thinkers, and can work well within a team". This suggests that employability is likely to be less about nurturing attributes, techniques or experiences just to enable a student to get a job; it is about learning with less emphasis on 'employ' and more on 'ability'. The prominence is on developing critical and reflective skills, with a view to empowering and enhancing the learner. Employment is a by-product of this enabling process (Harvey, 2003; Lees, 2002; Knight and Yorke, 2002).

Much of the literature broadly defines employability attributes as: key, core, generic, personal transferable skills, work/employment related skills (Holmes, 2001). However Lees, (2002) suggests this imprecision makes it difficult to pinpoint exactly what is meant by the term 'employability skills'. It can be argued, it is where various employers' needs and individuals' attributes meet.

Competencies in the hospitality industry encompasses a wide range of professions, including those related to food service and lodging. Small businesses with a focus in hospitality

services need to understand the skills and competencies typically required of those employed in the industry to ensure they hire the best and brightest for any position, especially those in management.

Individuals employed in the hospitality industry must meet specific professional standards to be effective in the position. These standards allow businesses operating in the hospitality sector to service clients and customers in an appropriate manner. Standards include demonstrating an ability to communicate in an efficient manner and portraying a high degree of professionalism at all times. Employees working within the industry should also possess specific personality traits such as friendliness, honesty and dependability.

Flinders University (2013) cited examples of graduate qualities that they expect their students to develop an extensive and well-founded knowledge in their field of study. This includes the ability to acquire and understand, using current technologies and effective learning strategies, information and ideas that underpin this knowledge. Furthermore, students need to develop the ability to use their knowledge to plan, to analyse, to think critically, logically and creatively, to reflect upon and evaluate ideas, options, and potential solutions to problems, and to make and implement decisions. Students need to learn to convey clearly and fluently their knowledge, understanding, reasoning and decisions. The industry expects them to be able to do this in written and spoken form, as appropriate to the particular audience and setting. It is also expected for them to listen well and to respond constructively. Students need to take responsibility for, and become self-reliant in, their learning and their work. This includes organising their activities, prioritising their tasks and managing their time productively. It also includes recognising that the world is dynamic and changing, and therefore being prepared to take responsibility in the years ahead to review, update and adapt their knowledge and skills.

Students have to interact effectively and properly with others in a variety of settings. This includes, where appropriate, working cooperatively and productively within a group or team towards a common outcome. It also includes showing respect to others and to their ideas and perspectives, and learning to negotiate and resolve conflict or difficulties constructively.

Students need to act with integrity in all matters. We also expect them to become aware of the ethical complexities and implications of various issues that can arise within their field of study, and to appreciate the need for themselves and others to act ethically and to learn how to arrive at ethical solutions to problems (Flinders University, 2013).

Also, employers value employees who come to work on time, are there when they are supposed to be, and are responsible for their actions and behavior (Loretto, 2013). Employers seek job-seekers who love what they do and will keep at it until they solve the problem and get the job done.

There's no question that all employers desire employees who will arrive to work every day -- on time -- and ready to work, and who will take responsibility for their actions (Hansen, . and Hansen, 2013).

Communication is another preferred attribute of employers. Ontario Ministry of Training (2013) defined communication as a clear, concise and correct manner that requires producing the written, spoken and visual material that best suits the situation. They also mention that graduates will have developed their ability to analyze their audiences to identify what was required and to match those needs with the means that was most appropriate. Responding to message from many source require the ability to receive and to comprehend what has been received. This requires graduate students to have developed the skills to read, listen to and observe message contained within narrative and visual form.

Communication in the workplace was always an important issue which was constantly addressed by employers and staff alike, excellent communication was a vital issue, because customers are paying not only for the product- the food, the room or the facilities- they are also paying for the service and service was just as much about communication as it was about skill.

Monash University (2012) enumerated examples of how hospitality work can develop employability skills in terms of communication skills handling difficult customer; communicated in a clear, precise manner in client conversations, meeting and greeting customer or front of house representation; ensured all patrons were addressed in a timely and courteous manner and assessed customer needs using active listening in busy environment in order to meet their requirements, preparing the bar/store for closing; communicated to all customer the closing- times and relevant information, and lastly serving customer; used questioning and active listening to ascertain and respond to customer needs.

As most hospitality businesses are open seven days a week and all year round, some are even open twenty-four hours a day, working enterprise is another preferred graduate attribute. This requires a lot of flexibility in an employee to be readily available. They have to be available when the customer wants service at the time of their choice, demanding for a lot of overtime. But once an employee does give this in, success is very sure to come (Dev, 2010).

According to Long (2013) working in the hospitality industry requires some knowledge regarding industry- and business-specific concerns. For instance, those employed in hotels must understand protocols related to security and safety. Employees and business owners must also fully understand the laws and regulations that govern the industry. For instance, restaurant employees must adhere to regulations designed to enforce health standards across the industry,

such as keeping workstations clean, storing food at appropriate temperatures and working with clean hands at all times.

Employers seek employees who are adaptable and maintain flexibility in completing tasks in an ever changing workplace. Employers seek employees who are interested in keeping up with new developments and knowledge in the field (Loretto, 2013).

No matter what age, no matter how much experience the employees have they should always be willing to learn a new skill or technique. Jobs are constantly changing and evolving, and one must show an openness to grow and learn with that change (Hansen and Hansen, 2013).

Flexibility and adaptability also represent important competencies of those working in the hospitality industry. These skills come in handy when met with challenges related to teamwork and handling customers (Long, 2013).

This refers to a person's ability to adapt to changing situations by accepting changes in one's job and organisation, looking forward to working with different and new people, the willingness to take risks as well as having self-confidence (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011).

Barry (2006) claimed that employers often desire a consistent core of skills independent of degree subject. This core set includes interactive attributes, communication skills, interpersonal skill and team working – together with personal attributes. Personal attributes include intellect and problem solving, analytic, critical and reflective ability, willingness to lean, flexibility, adaptability and risk – taking an understanding of the world and work culture together with someone commercial awareness are also desirable attributes.

Today, there are numerous other businesses and industries that are on the lookout for people who have hospitality expertise. When an individual decides to make a career in hospitality or tourism management, he does not only find it only profitable but rewarding as

well. Besides giving career the much needed boost over a short span of time, a hospitality career also brings exciting opportunities of interacting with new people and exploring their culture. As well as to experience cross-country cultures, it brings new ideas . The field of hospitality also demands a lot of creative and innovative skills. If a graduate is really hardworking and committed towards work, a career in hospitality will soon take him/her to new heights. And soon will be reaping the exciting benefits of this career, both professionally and personally.

Gray, Whiten, Knightbridge (2002) supported by Long (2013), Schreuder & Coetzee (2011), and Loretto (2013) said that one area that employers of marketing graduates are looking for, but see as missing are students' Adaptive Skills. Flexibility and adaptability also represent important competencies of those working in the hospitality industry. It also value having responsible and trustworthy staff, consequently, this theme relates to the graduates Desirable Persona. Two sub themes emerged under this attribute; these being reliability and trustworthiness. The term reliability was considered as someone who can be held accountable to internal work partners as well as external business customers. The trustworthy attribute described by marketing mangers is about the ability of post/graduates to build trust among customers (Gray, Whiten & Knightbridge, 2002).

This study sought to determine the preferred employability attributes of hotel and restaurant management graduates among select restaurant managers. Specifically, this sought answers to the following: (1) The manager's profile in terms of age, gender, and length of experience as a manager; (2) the respondent's preferred employability attributes among hotel and restaurant management graduates in terms of executive ability, communication, desirable persona, working enterprise, professional knowledge, and adaptive skills; (3) any significant

difference in the respondents' preferred employability attributes of hotel and restaurant management graduates when the respondents are grouped according to profile variables.

Methods

This study utilized the descriptive research design. Through this research design, this study enables the researchers to describe systematically, factually, accurately, and objectively a situation, problem or phenomenon (Catane, 2000) the study used this method in determining the demographic profile of the Restaurant Managers and the employability attributes of Hotel and Restaurant Management graduates. Moreover, this design determines the difference among these variables.

For this study only those restaurants in Paseo de Santa Rosa, Nuvali and Solenad 2 were taken as sample. The total number of registered casual dining restaurants was 40. The total population of the study is as follows: Paseo de Santa Rosa (17), Nuvali (14), Solenad 2 (9).

The study utilized the purposive sampling technique with the following criteria: (1) Respondents must be managers of Casual Dining Restaurants. (2) Must serve at least 6 months as a Restaurant Manager.

A researcher-made instrument was used which was divided into 2 parts. The first part was a screening process to find out whether the participant is under the qualified respondents. The second part of the questionnaire elicited the respondents' preferred employability attributes of a Hotel and Restaurant Management graduate which included the following: Executive Ability, Communication, Desirable Persona, Working Enterprise, Professional Knowledge, and Adaptive Skills.

The researcher-made questionnaire was validated by three experts who had experience as restaurant manager, teacher, and statistician, with a background in Hospitality Industry. A pre-test conducted to one restaurant manager who was not part of the identified sample respondents for clarity of language and was answering the questionnaire.

To measure the preferred employability attributes of Hotel and Restaurant Management graduates by select restaurant managers, the following numeral ranges and verbal interpretations were utilized: A scale of 4 ranging3.51 - 4.00 - Very much preferred; a scale of 3 ranging2.51 - 3.50 – Preferred; A scale of 2 ranging 1.51 - 2.50 - Moderately Preferred; and a scale of 1 ranging 1 - 1.50 - Least Preferred.

For data gathering procedure, the researchers presented a letter to the Office of the Dean of the College of International Hospitality Management to ask for a letter of endorsement to restaurant managers to conduct the study. Upon gaining approval, the researchers sought approval of the restaurant managers.

The data were treated using statistics to show the following: percentage for describing the profile of the respondents, weighted mean to determine the manager's preferred employability attributes among Hotel and Restaurant Management graduates, t-test for independent samples to determine if there is significant difference in the manager's preferred employability attributes among Hotel and Restaurant Management graduates when they are grouped according to gender and length of experience as manager, and Mann-Whitney U test to determine if there is significant difference in the manager's preferred employability attributes among Hotel and Restaurant Management graduates when they are grouped according to age.

Ethics was highly observed throughout the conduct of this research. Anonymity of respondents was observed in this research as it indicates concern for privacy ensuring

confidentiality. Likewise, citations were duly made for previous research referred to as proper acknowledgments were made in this paper.

Results and Discussions

Profile of the Respondents. Table 1 presents the profile of the respondents.

Profile of the Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
26 and above	15	37.50
21-25	25	62.50
Total	40	100.00
Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	22	55.00
Female	18	45.00
Total	40	100.00
Length of Experience	Frequency	Percentage
3 years and above	22	55.00
Less than 3 years	18	45.00
Total	40	100.00

Table 1 presents the profile of the respondents in terms of age, gender, and length of experience. Among the 40 respondents, 15 (37.50 percent) belonged to the 26 and above age bracket while 25 (62.50 percent) belonged to the 21-25 age bracket. In terms of gender, 22 (55.00 percent) belonged to the male population while 18 (45.00 percent) belonged to the female population. And in terms of length of experience, 22 (55 %) had 3 years and above length of experience while 18 (45 %) has less than 3 years length of experience.

Preferred Employability Attributes. Table 2 shows a summary of the managers'

preferred employability attributes of Hotel and Restaurant Management graduates, according to

the indicators presented.

Table 2

**Summary Table of the Managers' Preferred Employability Attributes
of Hotel and Restaurant Management Graduates**

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation	Rank
Executive Ability	3.79	Very much preferred	2.5
Communication	3.81	Very much preferred	1
Desirable Persona	3.78	Very much preferred	4
Working Enterprise	3.76	Very much preferred	5
Professional Knowledge	3.79	Very much preferred	2.5
Adaptive Skills	3.74	Very much preferred	6
Overall Weighted Mean	3.78	Very much preferred	

Table 2 presents the managers' preferred employability attributes among Hotel and

Restaurant Management graduates. The table showed that the respondents "very much preferred"

all the indicators, with an average score of 3.78. Respondents showed that they had high

preference in terms of communication skills with a rank of 1 and had a weighted mean of 3.81. It

was followed by executive ability and professional knowledge with a rank of 2.5 and had a

weighted mean of 3.79. On the other hand, respondents showed that they had low preference in

terms of adaptive skills with a rank of 6 and had a weighted mean of 3.74.

This "very much preferred" employability attributes among HRM graduates is supported with what Knight and Yorke (2003) purported that a set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen careers. Flinders University (2013) cited examples of graduate qualities that they expect their students to develop an extensive and well-founded knowledge in their field of study. In terms of communication students need to learn to convey clearly and fluently their knowledge, understanding, reasoning and decisions. The students are expected to be able to do this in written and spoken form, as appropriate to the particular audience and setting. The students are also expected to listen well and to respond constructively. This is supported by James (2010), that employees are required to possessed a high standard of oral and written communication skills for persuasion, client relationship management and forecasting.

Preferred Employability Attributes of Hotel and Restaurant Management Graduates when Grouped According to Profile Variables. Tables 3, 4, and 5 shows the difference in the managers' preferred employability attributes of Hotel and Restaurant Management graduates when grouped according to age, gender, and length of experience as managers.

Table 3

Difference in the Managers' Preferred Employability Attributes of Hotel and Restaurant Management Graduates when Grouped According to Age

Preferred Employability Attributes	Mann-Whitney U	z value	p value	Interpretation
Executive Ability	183.00	0.13	0.8966	Not Significant
Communication	138.50	1.37	0.1706	Not Significant
Desirable Persona	132.50	1.54	0.1236	Not Significant
Working Enterprise	160.50	0.75	0.4532	Not Significant
Professional Knowledge	176.00	0.32	0.7490	Not Significant
Adaptive Skills	135.50	1.45	0.1470	Not Significant

0.05 level of significance

Table 3 shows the difference in the managers' preferred employability attributes among Hotel and Restaurant Management graduates in terms of age which reveals a not significant difference. All six employability attributes namely: executive ability, communication, desirable persona, working enterprise, professional knowledge and adaptive skills yield no difference in the managers' preference when grouped according to their age, with an obtained p values which were higher than the significance level of 0.05. This means that the managers, regardless of their age, have the same preference for the said employability attributes of the Hotel and Restaurant Management graduates. This further indicates that preference of employability attributes by the managers is independent on their age.

Table 4

**Difference in the Managers' Preferred Employability Attributes of
Hotel and Restaurant Management Graduates when Grouped According to Gender**

Preferred Employability Attributes	Mean, X_1 Male	Mean, X_2 Female	Computed t value	Interpretation
Executive Ability	3.74	3.82	0.72	Not Significant
Communication	3.81	3.83	0.38	Not Significant
Desirable Persona	3.78	3.76	0.21	Not Significant
Working Enterprise	3.70	3.83	1.42	Not Significant
Professional Knowledge	3.76	3.83	0.97	Not Significant
Adaptive Skills	3.73	3.75	0.23	Not Significant

0.05 level of significance
Critical t value = 2.021

Table 4 shows the difference in the managers' preferred employability attributes among Hotel and Restaurant Management graduates in terms of gender which reveals a not significant difference. All six employability attributes namely: executive ability, communication, desirable persona, working enterprise, professional knowledge and adaptive skills yield no difference in the managers' preference when grouped according to their gender. Computed t values obtained were lower than the critical t value of 2.021 at 0.05 level of significance. This means that the managers, regardless of their gender, have the same preference for the said employability attributes of the Hotel and Restaurant Management graduates. This further indicates that preference of employability attributes by the managers is independent on their gender.

Table 5

**Difference in the Managers' Preferred Employability Attributes of
Hotel and Restaurant Management Graduates when Grouped According to
Length of Experience as Managers**

Preferred Employability Attributes	Mean, X_1 less than 3 years	Mean, X_2 3 years or more	Computed t value	Interpretation
Executive Ability	3.81	3.75	0.49	Not Significant
Communication	3.79	3.84	0.70	Not Significant
Desirable Persona	3.72	3.82	1.01	Not Significant
Working Enterprise	3.79	3.74	0.57	Not Significant
Professional Knowledge	3.75	3.83	1.08	Not Significant
Adaptive Skills	3.74	3.74	0.03	Not Significant

0.05 level of significance
Critical t value = 2.021

Table 5 shows the difference in the managers' preferred employability attributes among Hotel and Restaurant Management graduates in terms of length of experience asmanagers which reveals a not significant difference. All six employability attributesnamely: executive ability, communication, desirable persona, working enterprise, professional knowledge and adaptive skills yield no difference in the managers' preference when grouped according to their length of experience. Computed t values obtained were lower than the critical t value of 2.021 at 0.05 level of significance. This means that the managers, regardless of their length of experience, have the same preference for the said employability attributes of the Hotel and Restaurant Management graduates. This further indicates that preference of employability attributes by the managers is independent on their length of experience.

Conclusions. Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were developed:Majority of the respondents were 21-25 years old, males and more than half had 3 years and above in the service. Also, the manager's preferred employability attributes of Hotel and Restaurant Management graduates which were all very much preferred were communication skills, executive ability and professional knowledge and adaptive skills.

There is no significant difference between the manager's preferred employability attributes of Hotel and Restaurant Management graduates when the managers are grouped according to profile variables.

Directions for Future Use. The indicators of preferred attributes presented in this study shows the need for enhancement of opportunitiesfor Hotel and Restaurant Management students to use their oral communication skills specially both in classrooms and on-the-job trainings. This holds true for other attributes aside from communication, which were also *very much preferred*such as executive ability, desirable persona, working enterprise, and professional knowledge. Moreover, a similar study is recommended to be undertaken using larger samples in order to determine and further establish the extent of other attributes for preference in employability of Hotel and Restaurant Management Graduates.

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