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Creating a better future for the hospitality and tourism education

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Abstract

In recent years, countless hospitality and tourism programs have been experiencing low enrollment, budgetary issues, low scores in the college rankings, and failure to secure good job opportunities for their graduates. This occurs due to the implementation of unethical hiring and recruiting practices for faculty and staff, poor decision-making over key operational areas, abusive supervision, lack of ethical leadership, and careless strategic planning. However, the major reason is that there has been a huge gap between the hospitality and tourism academia and the industry which keeps growing. This is a rapidly changing industry where new trends are constantly emerging, new technologies are introduced, and innovative strategies arise. Meanwhile, hospitality and tourism programs around the world fail to understand the ever-changing industry trends, adapt to the new standards, and revise their curriculum accordingly. COVID-19 was the final blow that pushed academic institutions to their limits and created additional challenges. This chapter aims to address the issues that the hospitality and tourism academia has been struggling with, offer practical recommendations that will help tackle its operational difficulties, provide top quality education, prepare the leaders of tomorrow effectively, and bring it closer to the industry.

Keywords:

Hospitality and tourism education, hospitality and tourism industry trends, hospitality and tourism curriculum design, unethical leadership, equality, diversity

Introduction

One of the major obstacles that has been standing in the way of success of the hospitality and tourism academia throughout the years is the huge gap that separates it from the industry. There is a clear disconnect between the industry's needs and how academia prepares its hospitality and tourism students for a successful career upon graduation. That has a direct impact on the quality of the curriculum and the education that our hospitality and tourism programs offer which, in turn, influences their enrollment and financial performance. There are many reasons for this which include unethical hiring and recruiting practices for faculty and staff, poor decision-making over key operational areas, abusive supervision, and lack of ethical leadership. While our hospitality and tourism programs have been struggling to deal with these serious problems, the COVID-19 pandemic, brought a series of new challenges that most of them were not prepared or ready to face. Now, more than ever, is the time to learn from the mistakes of the past and help the academic world of hospitality and tourism make a brand-new start that will lead to success. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight those areas that need improving and offer recommendations on what can be done to improve our hospitality and tourism programs, help them achieve their goals, and create a better future for our field. It is our responsibility as educators to prepare ethical future leaders and course designers must collaborate with those working in hospitality to keep up with the industry's needs and prepare their graduates accordingly (Dimitriou, 2017).

A review of hospitality and tourism education

Many hospitality and tourism programs are facing a number of critical challenges such as budgetary and low enrollment issues, high faculty turnover, and low scores in the college rankings. This indicates that we are on the wrong path and are engaging in poor practices and procedures that hinder success. There are certain areas in our hospitality and tourism programs around the world that need to be improved, if we want to achieve excellence and offer high quality education to our students. It is important to identify and address these areas which negatively impact our schools, departments and programs. These areas are presented in Table 12.1.

Table 12.1: Areas for improvement of the hospitality and tourism education

Common mistakes in the recruiting and hiring process
The gap between the hospitality and tourism industry and academia
Ignoring the hottest industry trends
Unethical leadership and abusive supervision
COVID-19 and its challenges

Common mistakes in the recruiting and hiring process

Sadly, a growing number of universities engage in nepotism and favoritism. These are “*unprofessional practices giving preferential treatment to relatives and friends in employment*” (Arasli & Tumer, 2008: 1237) who may not have the competencies needed to get that job. Hornby et al. (1974) define nepotism as “*the giving of special favour (esp employment) by a person in high position to his relatives*” (p. 566). According to Arasli and Tumer (2008), “*favoritism means the provision of special privilege to friends, colleagues and acquaintances, in the areas of employment, career and personnel decisions*” and both nepotism and favoritism “*easily penetrate and corrupt decisions and practices*” (p. 1239). They also supported that “*nepotism has negative effects on human resource management recruitment and selection practices because candidates are chosen for their friendships and blood relationships. Since those workers may not have adequate relevant knowledge and job skills, they may not perform as well as suitably qualified candidates. This destroys organizational fairness, motivation and harmony while bringing inefficiency along with insufficient training and development activities. Conflict may arise between the worker who is already in the job and the new member of staff who has been hired because of his/her family relationship*” (Arasli & Tumer, 2008: 1239). It is extremely hard to create a work environment where professionalism and institutionalization prevail when the workforce consists of relatives, friends, and people who share strong personal relationships. Things become more complicated when these people who are related (e.g., a married couple) work for the same department of a university and one of the spouses acquires a position of authority (e.g., department chair) in that department and becomes their immediate supervisor. In this scenario, it is easy to understand how this unethical climate can impact the department resulting in reduced morale, motivation, and productiveness of the other faculty members.