

THE ALIGNMENT OF HOSPITALITY EDUCATION WITH INDUSTRY NEEDS IN TRANSITIONAL COUNTRIES: THE CASE OF CROATIA

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of research which sought to explore to what extent tertiary hospitality programs in Croatia are in alignment with the needs of the hospitality industry. Two specific areas were explored: which skills and competencies are most important for entry-level positions and in which area(s) were the most significant gaps perceived between what the company needed and what was available on the labor market. Research consisted of a survey completed by 49 respondents employed in management positions within the Croatian hospitality industry. Results indicated that guest-focused skills and competencies were most in need of improvement.

Key words: Hospitality education; Croatian hospitality industry; Hospitality graduates employability.

JEL Classification: A, O

INTRODUCTION

Hospitality education plays an important role in transitional countries, particularly those, such as Croatia, which have a significant hospitality and tourism industry (Becic, Crnjar, 2009; Bunja, 2003).

While the purpose of higher education is more than simply to prepare graduates for employment, the primary objective of most students enrolled in hospitality programs is to enhance their employability through tertiary studies. In order to ensure that their employability is enhanced, it is important that hospitality programs communicate with the hospitality industry regarding the knowledge, skills, and competencies they need in their human resources (Harvey, Locke et al, 2002; Ladkin, 2002; Staton-Reynolds, Ryan et al, 2009).

Another important function of hospitality education is to provide cutting edge education to its graduates; when these graduates are employed within the industry, they bring this knowledge with them and thus contribute to the ongoing competitiveness of the hospitality industry (Mihalic, 2002; Zehrer, Mossenlechner, 2009). This is particularly important for hospitality industries within transitional countries (Bunja, 2003; Markovic, 2005).

The alignment of the hospitality industry with hospitality tertiary programs also serves to improve society in general, particularly in transitional countries which often are caught up in the sometimes difficult process of trying to raise general conditions and economic levels. High unemployment is a common

problem for transitional countries (Aguayo, Exposito et al, 2009), while often at the same time industries within those countries cannot find the employees they need. When a miss-match such as this occurs, all suffer. Overall society may wonder if the difficulties experienced during transition are indeed worth it, given the near full employment which characterized many of these societies in the past (Aguayo et al, 2009).

For many transitional countries, tourism is seen as an area of the national economy that has potential for growth and development, often offsetting other industries which are contracting. It is expected that tourism can improve a country's GDP and increase employment, particularly on a regional basis (Becic, Crnjar, 2009).

Tourism and Hospitality in Croatia

Blessed with natural beauty and a rich cultural heritage, tourism is already an important part of the Croatian economy. Between the years of 2004-2007, it accounted for 6% of all employment and for about 19% of Croatia's GDP (Becic, Crnjar, 2009). In line with the global trend towards growth in the tourism sector, tourism in Croatia is expected to increase. Europe is one of the areas of the world with the strongest tourism sectors. It is estimated that 87% of tourists visiting the EU are from other European countries; out of these, most are traveling for leisure, with only 20% traveling for business purposes (Jonckers, 2005). Forecasts estimate that tourist arrivals will double in the next 25 years (Jonckers, 2005), while the World Tourism Organization in 2001 estimated that by the end of 2020, more than 720

million tourists would be travelling within Europe (WTO, 2001).

Although tourism in Croatia is expected to significantly increase in the next few decades, consumers are becoming increasingly demanding and competition within the industry is increasing. Success is anything but assured. Hospitality employee skills and competencies are crucial for achieving the competitiveness and continued attractiveness of Croatia as a tourist destination. Currently the educational qualifications of Croatian employees within the tourism and hospitality sectors lag considerably behind the EU's leading tourism countries (Becic, Crnjar, 2009).

Overall, the educational level of Croatian society is low, with less than 15% being "highly educated" (Cetinski, Sugar, 2009). Improvement of educational levels is seen as a key factor for the overall improvement of the Croatian economy in general, and for the hospitality industry specifically (Becic, Crnjar, 2009; Cetinski, Sugar, 2009; Krbec, Krajnovic, 2006). Within the hospitality industry, education and training have been neglected; instead, the focus has been on the development of tourism and hospitality facilities (Cetinski, Sugar, 2009).

One problem facing Croatian industry is that employers need a higher level of education and different kinds of skills, but the educational system is slow to react to the changing needs of industry. Skjolstrup (2008) identifies two main areas that he feels need to be improved within the Croatian educational system. First, he believes that the employability of Croatians as a whole could be improved by more training geared at personal and social or "soft" skills; he notes that this is particularly true for Croatia because of the importance of hospitality and tourism within the Croatian economy. He also identifies the need for graduates who are educated in modern management theory and practice, noting that "the disciplines involved in managing companies in the past are very different from those required of private companies operating in a market economy and faced by increasingly severe international competition" (p.17).

Thus it would seem that despite the fact that the tourism and hospitality industry is vital to the health and development of the Croatian economy, that industry is encountering some challenges in finding employees who possess the skills and competencies the industry needs to be competitive. This paper will explore to what extent tertiary hospitality programs in Croatia are in alignment with the needs of the hospitality industry. Two specific areas will be explored: which skills and competencies are most important for entry-level positions and in which area(s) are the most significant gaps perceived between what the company needs and what is available on the labor market.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many previous studies have been conducted into competencies important for hospitality graduates (Christou, 2002; Dopson, Nelson, 2003). Results usually indicate that a general list of skills are needed for success within the industry, including human relations and stress management skills, professional ethical standards, diplomacy, effective communication skills (oral and written), leadership abilities, knowledge of basic accounting practices, guest security, customer relations, and conceptual skills.

Tesons and Ricci (2005) surveyed hospitality employers, asking them which skills and competencies were most needed for success within the hospitality industry. Results indicated that the ability to work as part a team, good communication skills, the ability to empathize with others, customer service skills, the ability to project a professional image, comprehension of performance standards, and realistic job/career expectations were considered to be the most important. Meanwhile, Zehrer and Mossenlechner (2009) surveyed hospitality employers to determine which competencies they most value. Results indicated that hospitality employers most highly value communication competencies, self-motivation and the willingness to learn, language competencies, conceptual skills, willingness and personal commitment, and problem-solving skills.

Staton-Reynolds, Ryan, and Scott-Halsell (2009) surveyed hospitality recruiters and hospitality program educators regarding the skills and competencies hospitality program graduates need to have. The focus of their research was specifically on program graduates hired for entry-level manager positions within hospitality organizations. The purpose of the research was to identify to what degree the industry and educators were in alignment. While research results showed that a gap did exist between the two parties, they did select the same 10 skills and competencies (out of 89) as being the most important: integrity, being enthusiastic, being able and willing to learn, maintaining professional work standards and appearance, being a hardworking and conscientious worker, having listening skills, having a focus on service quality, taking initiative, being a clear and effective communicator, and being flexible and adaptable to change.

Existing literature on hospitality and tourism education emphasizes the increasing importance of technology within the industry, calling for its inclusion within hospitality and tourism curriculum to be increased (Dopson, 2005; Henriksson, 2005). All too often, hospitality graduates require additional technological training when they are hired within the industry (Dopson, 2005). Again, the effect is not only on the marketability of the graduates, but also

represents a failure of hospitality education in its role as a conduit for the dissemination of the latest knowledge as a means of updating practice. Technological education should comprise knowledge of technological trends, training in the use of common software used within the industry, and training on the use of technology in marketing (for example web design, data analysis, yield management, and the use of social networks) (Hendriksson, 2005).

Dopson (2005) explored to what degree specific e-commerce competencies were in demand within the hospitality industry for hospitality professionals. Results indicated that basic knowledge of how to use a computer was considered to be most important, followed by the ability to employ yield management techniques, to use on-line reservation software, to use internet web browsers effectively, to manage e-distribution, and to use technology to build markets and customer relationships.

Another theme increasingly emphasized in hospitality education literature is the importance of cross-cultural training. This training should prepare employees to professionally deliver quality service to guests from different cultures (Zehrer, Mossenlechner, 2009). As the hospitality industry labor market is increasingly international, it should also give employees the skills needed to work effectively with others from different cultures (Machievelli, 2002), and potentially to manage a culturally diverse staff in the future (Dawson, Neal, Madera, 2010).

In addition to the particular pressures upon hospitality programs in transitional countries, the dynamism of the industry itself also necessitates that hospitality programs and the industry are in alignment. Changing labor markets, increased global competition, technological advances, and changing demand patterns directly affect the hospitality field on an ongoing basis (Zehrer, Mossenlechner, 2009). Cox and King (2006) emphasize that employers, themselves needing to be increasingly adaptable and flexible, are also looking for employees who possess those same abilities. Because of the changing nature of the hospitality and tourism industries, latest developments in the field of hospitality and tourism education also emphasize that students should be prepared with basic skills and competencies developed through a multidisciplinary approach which will equip them for a successful career despite the many changes that they will encounter during that time (Krbec, Krajnovic, 2006; Macchiavelli, 2002; Sheldon, Fesenmaier et al 2008; Staton-Reynolds, Ryan et al, 2009; Zehrer & Mossenlechner, 2009). Particularly emphasized are analytical and decision making skills (Bunja, 2003; Samuelson, 2006), being proactive (Fallows, Steven, 2000), being able to identify and respond to problems creatively and autonomously (Fallows, Steven, 2000), and conceptual skills (Pink, 2005).

Within a project entitled "Tourism Education Futures: 2010-2030", Sheldon et al (2008) investigated which employee skills would be most needed in the future within the hospitality industry. Referencing that the field is rapidly changing and that jobs which may be in demand in the near future may not even exist today, they emphasized a core set of skills and competencies which would equip today's hospitality graduates for career success. Results were indicated through a combination of surveys and discussions between 45 senior hospitality educators and industry representatives. The results of this process designated 4 areas as being most important: Destination Stewardship Skills (which included the management of real and virtual networks, knowledge sharing skills, the ability to respect and work with all stakeholders, the ability to manage complex adaptive systems, and environmental management skills), Political and Ethical Skills (which included ethical behavior, the integration of basic human values into the workplace, and the ability to lobby and influence the political process), Enhanced Human Resource Skills (which included team building, effective listening and negotiation skills, motivation and leadership, working with distributed, virtual project teams, and emotional intelligence) and Dynamic Business Skills (which included flexibility, the ability to multitask, critical thinking skills, optimal use of common sense, and innovation/entrepreneurship).

METHODS

The research question to be explored in this research was "How well are higher education hospitality programs aligned with the needs of the hospitality industry in Croatia?". Two specific areas were explored: which skills and competencies are most important for entry-level positions and in which area(s) were the most significant gaps perceived between what the company needed and what was available on the labor market.

In order to reach the greatest number of respondents, it was decided that a quantitative research approach would be best. Existing literature included many examples of surveys which had been developed in recent years, but no survey seemed best suited to the Croatian hospitality field. Although surveys utilized by Zehrer and Mossenlechner (2009) and Tesone and Ricci (2005) were heavily relied upon, decisions regarding which elements to include were influenced by preliminary interviews held with the directors of two Croatian hotels, as well as the director of Udruga Poslodavaca u Hotelijerstvu Hrvatske (UPUHH-Association of Hospitality Employers of Croatia). Based on existing literature as well as unstructured interviews a survey was developed.

The theoretical population consisted of all employers and managers working within the hospitality field in Croatia. The survey was translated into the Croatian language and distributed through Survey Gizmo. An e-mail was sent to potential respondents which briefly described the purpose of the research being conducted and asked them to fill out the survey through clicking on the Survey Gizmo link provided. The director of Udruga Poslodavaca u Hotelijerstvu Hrvatske (UPUHH-Association of Hospitality Employers of Croatia) sent an e-mail to the members of that association. E-mails were also sent by the researchers to members of Nacionalna Udruga Obiteljski Malih Hotela (OMH-Association of Family and Small Hotels of Croatia) as well as American College of Management and Technology alumni who were employers or managers within Croatian hospitality organizations.

A total of 49 respondents completed the questionnaire. Of these, 23 (46.9%) were from the ACMT alumni network, 17 (34.7%) were from UPUHH, 8 (16.3%) were from OMH, and 1 (2%) selected "other".

RESULTS

Question 1 asked:

Do you find that there are enough qualified applicants for vacant positions within your organization? 53.1% of the respondents (26) answered "yes", while 46.9% (23) of the respondents answered "no".

Question 2 asked:

Do you feel that, in general, college tourism and hospitality programs in Croatia do an adequate job of preparing graduates for jobs in the industry?

41.7% (20) of the respondents answered "yes", while 58.3% (28) of them answered "no"; one respondent did not answer this question.

In the next section of the survey, a number of skills and competencies were listed. Respondents were asked, *When your company hires a graduate of a college hospitality program, what skills and competencies does your company need that graduate to have?* and were asked to select whether each was "not very important", "important", or "very important".

The results can be seen in Table 1. A weighted average was calculated for each item, and its rank in order of importance (with "1" being the most important) can also be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 - The importance of graduate skills and competencies to the Croatian hospitality industry

In your opinion, how important is it that a hospitality program graduate:	Not Very Important	Important	Very Important	Rank
Is knowledgeable of customer service standards	2%	51%	47%	14
Has basic knowledge of what is needed for a hospitality business to be successful	2%	61.3%	36.7%	19
Knows how to behave in a professional way	0%	8.2%	91.8%	1
Can create a good 1 st impression	0%	40.8%	59.2%	9
Is able to empathize with the guest experience (to see the situation from the guest's perspective)	0%	38.8%	61.2%	8
Behaves in an ethical way	0%	26.5%	73.5%	3
Is able to effectively handle an upset guest	0%	26.5%	73.5%	3
Is knowledgeable of the latest technology and software programs used in hospitality	20.4%	49%	30.6%	29
Is knowledgeable of the use of the internet and social websites for marketing purposes	12.2%	63.3%	24.5%	28
Knows how to employ yield-management techniques	16.3%	53.1%	30.6%	27
Is knowledgeable and skillful in serving F&B	17.1%	61%	22%	31
Is knowledgeable in gastronomy/wines	34.1%	61%	4.9%	32
Is able to deal with uncertainties and changes in daily routine	4.1%	36.7%	59.2%	12
Is able to balance the needs of multiple guests at the same time	6.1%	36.7%	57.2%	13
Takes personal pride in satisfying the needs of others	6.1%	55.1%	38.8%	15
Can learn from his/her mistakes	2%	30.7%	67.3%	6
Thinks about what can be done to satisfy guests rather than what can't be done (sees possibilities rather than is focused on avoiding negative outcomes)	0%	24.5%	75.5%	2
Is able to work effectively as part of a team	0%	28.6%	71.4%	5
Can effectively solve problems	0%	36.7%	63.3%	7
Can be creative, see new possibilities and generate new ideas	2%	53.1%	44.9%	20
Has a basic knowledge of business management	12.2%	67.4%	20.4%	30
Is knowledgeable of cultural differences in guests and adapts to these	8.2%	55.1%	36.7%	25
Is able to effectively work with others (co-workers) from different cultures	6.1%	55.1%	38.8%	22
Can make appropriate decisions	2%	63.3%	34.7%	21
Brings new information and ideas into the company (from his/her education)	2%	57.2%	40.8%	16
Has strong analytical skills	12.2%	59.2%	28.6%	26
Has strong listening skills (active listening)	4.1%	34.7%	61.2%	10
Has strong verbal communication skills	2%	38.8%	59.2%	11
Has strong written communication skills	8.2%	51%	40.8%	24
Has realistic job/career expectations	4.1%	51%	44.9%	17
Can use innovative or creative approaches to handle problems	6.1%	55.1%	38.8%	22
Is knowledgeable of trends in the hospitality industry	4.1%	57.1%	38.8%	18

Next, the same list of skills and competencies was provided, and respondents were asked to indicate for which behaviors current levels in hospitality

program graduates were unacceptable. The research results for this question as well as the rank of each can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2 - Gaps between what the hospitality industry needs and what graduates possess

Behavior	% of respondents which indicated that graduates possessed an "unsatisfactory" level of this behavior	Rank
Is knowledgeable of customer service standards	34.6%	16
Has basic knowledge of what is needed for a hospitality business to be successful	26.5%	25
Knows how to behave in a professional way	40.8%	11
Can create a good 1 st impression	12.2%	31
Is able to empathize with the guest experience (to see the situation from the guest's perspective)	46.9%	8
Behaves in an ethical way	14.3%	29
Is able to effectively handle an upset guest	63.3%	2
Is knowledgeable of the latest technology and software programs used in hospitality	48.9%	5
Is knowledgeable of the use of the internet and social websites for marketing purposes	26.5%	25
Knows how to employ yield-management techniques	67.3%	1
Is knowledgeable and skillful in serving F&B	51%	3
Is knowledgeable in gastronomy/wines	51%	3
Is able to deal with uncertainties and changes in daily routine	42.9%	10
Is able to balance the needs of multiple guests at the same time	40.8%	11
Takes personal pride in satisfying the needs of others	22.4%	28
Can learn from his/her mistakes	36.7%	13
Thinks about what can be done to satisfy guests rather than what can't be done (sees possibilities rather than is focused on avoiding negative outcomes)	44.9%	9
Is able to work effectively as part of a team	12.2%	31
Can effectively solve problems	34.6%	16
Can be creative, see new possibilities and generate new ideas	34.6%	16
Has a basic knowledge of business management	28.6%	23
Is knowledgeable of cultural differences in guests and adapts to these	36.7%	13
Is able to effectively work with others (co-workers) from different cultures	14.3%	29
Can make appropriate decisions	28.6%	23
Brings new information and ideas into the company (from his/her education)	30.6%	20
Has strong analytical skills	36.7%	13
Has strong listening skills (active listening)	34.6%	16
Has strong verbal communication skills	30.6%	20
Has strong written communication skills	30.6%	20
Has realistic job/career expectations	48.9%	5
Can use innovative or creative approaches to handle problems	26.5%	25
Is knowledgeable of trends in the hospitality industry	48.9%	5

Finally, respondents were asked if they felt that there were any areas, not included in the list above, which they felt needed to be improved. The following comments were submitted:

- "Interest in lifelong learning and development – creativity"
- "Do not have or limited work experience"
- "Experience/literacy/skills in writing business letters, offers, contracts"
- "Speaking foreign languages and readiness for further education, being pro-active, independence"
- "Adjusting to the conditions and environment of the hospitality and tourism industry in Croatia"
- "Excellent knowledge of at least three foreign languages, neatness and decency in dealing with guests and team members, taking responsibility for any omissions and / or mistakes - it is my personal opinion and after 5 years of managing various hotel

departments on several levels, including overall hotel operations, that newly graduated employees are not willing to follow the "natural course of things" or follow advancement in career that is bottom up, starting from relatively low levels, or lower positions (receptionist, waiter, concierge, etc.) - rather, they insist on positions in middle or higher management for which they have neither the knowledge nor the experience of such positions to exercise them with enough professionalism."

- "Knowledge of psychology and sociology for more adequate and easier people management, easier communication and understanding with colleagues, etc."

- "In short, it is evident that there has been a lack of practice during their studies! In addition – generally speaking - employees in Croatian hospitality and tourism industry certainly lack a proactive approach and positive attitude in their everyday work!"

- “Work habits suited to high-class tourist facilities, and general understanding of trends and guest psychology.”

- “General knowledge of day to day business activities. People who are employed with a Bachelor of Science degree do not know what it means to ask for an offer, they do not know what is pro-forma invoice, do not know to complete a basic payment form, which is the lack of some sort of trivial knowledge, but by joining the organization this deficiencies are putting them at a disadvantage compared to people with secondary education who have such knowledge. I also think that it is necessary to place a greater emphasis on training in hotel operations, prior to their employment, so that they could acquire a “big picture” of what each department is responsible for and how each department cooperates with each other. It is also necessary to integrate work practice in the education since we had students graduating without a single day of work practice. The hotels that they were sent to would just confirm that they’ve completed the practice but in reality they were asked not to come to work since it was problem for a hotel to train 20 students in addition to their current operations. This would require uniforms, continuous mentoring/monitoring and working with students and - in most of the cases - no one had the time to do so. They simply took an easy approach by providing practice-confirmation letters to students without having them complete even the minimum of the practical knowledge needed.”

- “More attention to foreign languages learning – learning from cases that are based in practice i.e. that are real business situations related to guest/customer relations and cases based on working in teams and managers”

- “It would be good to have the original software such as Opera or Fidelio (mostly used in hotel companies), so that students already have some knowledge about the software because most of the hoteliers are asking for such knowledge...”

DISCUSSION

The first part of the survey sought to establish if, in general, the hospitality industry is able to find the employees it needs to be successful. The results from the first two questions indicate that there is significant room for improvement in this area. While a slight majority (53% versus 47%) of the respondents felt that they could find qualified applicants for positions within their organization, this is hardly a satisfactory statistic. Similarly, respondents indicated that in general college tourism and hospitality programs in Croatia do not do a satisfactory job of preparing graduates for jobs within the industry. 58% indicated that the level of preparation was not

adequate in comparison to 42% which felt that it was adequate.

The second part of the survey focused on specific skills and competencies. It sought to determine which were considered to be most important by the hospitality industry, as well as for which ones it was felt that existing levels in college graduates were unsatisfactory. Table 3 contrasts these two data sets. For each, the top 10 responses are highlighted.

The purpose of Table 3 is to indicate in which areas improvement in hospitality education is most needed. For example, the respondents indicated most often that graduates possessed an unsatisfactory knowledge level of yield management. However, when one considers that this skill was ranked 27th out of 32 skills and competencies in importance to the organization, it would seem that this is perhaps not the most important area to improve within hospitality education. By contrasting these two sets of data, it would seem that the most critical areas to improve would be the ability to handle an upset guest, the ability to think about what can be done to satisfy guest rather than what can’t be done, and the ability to empathize with the guest experience. It is interesting to note that these are all “soft” skill areas related to guest relations.

The competency “knows how to behave in a professional way” is also an area which warrants significant improvements. In the preliminary interviews conducted prior to the development of the survey, this was the one commonality between all 3 interviews. The results of the survey confirmed the importance of this area: this was the skill/competency most often considered to be “very important”. Meanwhile, 41% of respondents felt that hospitality program graduates did not possess a satisfactory level of this competency.

The results would also suggest that other key areas, while perhaps not as critical, but never the +less important, which need to be improved are the ability of the employee to deal with uncertainties and changes in the daily routine, that the graduate has realistic job/career expectations, and that the graduate is knowledgeable of trends in the hospitality industry.

Conversely, it is interesting to note that the competencies of behaving in an ethical way, being able to work as part of a team, and the ability to create a good 1st impression, while considered by the industry to be very important, are generally thought to be possessed to a satisfactory level by hospitality program graduates.

The majority of existing literature into the skills and competencies which college graduates needs to possess in order to meet the needs of the hospitality industry tends to be general in nature. However, in reviewing the literature, three specific themes did emerge. The first had to do with the need for increased

technological training of hospitality graduates. The results of this study would indicate that this is not at this time a key consideration for the Croatian hospitality industry. 3 technological skills were included within the survey: knowing how to employ yield-management techniques, being knowledgeable

of the use of the internet and social websites for marketing purposes, and being knowledgeable of the latest technology and software programs used in hospitality. These 3 were considered to be the 27th, 28th, and 29th most important out of 32 skills and competencies.

Table 3 - Comparison of the results from question 3 and question 4

	Rank in order of importance	% of respondents which indicated that graduates possessed an "unsatisfactory" level of this behavior.
Knows how to behave in a professional way	1	40.8%
Thinks about what can be done to satisfy guests rather than what can't be done (sees possibilities rather than is focused on avoiding negative outcomes)	2	44.9% (9)
Behaves in an ethical way	3	14.3%
Is able to effectively handle an upset guest	3	63.3% (2)
Is able to work effectively as part of a team	5	12.2%
Can learn from his/her mistakes	6	36.7%
Can effectively solve problems	7	34.6%
Is able to empathize with the guest experience (to see the situation from the guest's perspective)	8	46.9% (8)
Can create a good 1 st impression	9	12.2%
Has strong listening skills (active listening)	10	34.6%
Has strong verbal communication skills	11	30.6%
Is able to deal with uncertainties and changes in daily routine	12	42.9% (10)
Is able to balance the needs of multiple guests at the same time	13	40.8%
Is knowledgeable of customer service standards	14	34.6%
Takes personal pride in satisfying the needs of others	15	22.4%
Brings new information and ideas into the company (from his/her education)	16	30.6%
Has realistic job/career expectations	17	48.9% (5)
Is knowledgeable of trends in the hospitality industry	18	48.9% (5)
Has basic knowledge of what is needed for a hospitality business to be successful	19	26.5%
Can be creative, sees new possibilities and generates new ideas	20	34.6%
Can make appropriate decisions	21	28.6%
Can use innovative or creative approaches to handle problems	22	26.5%
Is able to effectively work with others (co-workers) from different cultures	22	14.3%
Has strong written communication skills	24	30.6%
Is knowledgeable of cultural differences in guests and adapts to these	25	36.7%
Has strong analytical skills	26	36.7%
Knows how to employ yield-management techniques	27	67.3% (1)
Is knowledgeable of the use of the internet and social websites for marketing purposes	28	26.5%
Is knowledgeable of the latest technology and software programs used in hospitality	29	48.9% (5)
Has a basic knowledge of business management	30	28.6%
Is knowledgeable and skillful in serving F&B	31	51% (3)
Is knowledgeable in gastronomy/wines	32	51% (3)

Another theme which emerged within the hospitality education literature was the importance of the development of cross-cultural competence. 2 questions related to this area were included in the survey. The ability to work effectively with others (co-workers) from different cultures had a rank of 22nd out of 32 in importance; meanwhile only 14% of the respondents felt that this was an area which needed improvement. The other competency which was cross-cultural in nature was the knowledge of cultural difference in guests and the ability to adapt to these. This was ranked 25th out of 32 in importance; however, the respondents indicated that this was an area which more often warranted improvement in hospitality graduates, with 37% of the respondents indicating that current levels in hospitality program graduates were unsatisfactory.

The third theme which emerged from the hospitality education literature had to do with the concept of bypassing training in specific hospitality areas and instead focusing on a core set of skills and competencies which would equip the graduate to be successful in diverse positions over his or her career. The results do indicate that this is true within the Croatian hospitality industry as well. 2 specific industry-related skills were listed (*knowledge and skills in serving F&B, knowledge in gastronomy/wines*). Over half of the respondents (51%) felt that current levels for each of these in hospitality graduates were unsatisfactory; however these two areas ranked 31st and 32nd respectively (out of 32) in order of importance, making them the least important skills and competencies included within the survey.

It must be emphasized that the conducted research is preliminary in nature. The sample size was too small to be considered to be truly representative. However, the researchers feel that the findings do give a good foundation for more exhaustive research which

would examine the needs of the hospitality industry and the degree to which hospitality programs in Croatia are preparing their graduates for employment within the industry.

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