| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Empowering the National Capital Region (NCR) Hotel Industry Workforce: Basis for Education Policy Recommendations for Talent Development and Alignment with Industry Demands

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| ABSTRACT

This study investigated the critical employability skills necessary for the hotel industry workforce in the NCR, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including hotel industry managers, training providers, and academic leaders, while quantitative data was gathered from fifty alumni and employees of four- and five-star hotels. The research addressed several core issues: the essential employability skills required in the NCR hotel sector, the impact of existing skill gaps on job readiness and career progression, and the effectiveness of current training programs in bridging these gaps. Key findings revealed significant discrepancies between employer expectations and the competencies of the workforce, highlighting the need for enhanced training program accessibility, curriculum relevance, and continuous improvement mechanisms. The study also explores the relationship between employability skills, workforce impact, and training program effectiveness, leading to actionable policy recommendations aimed at fostering ongoing talent development and ensuring alignment with industry demands. By identifying critical employability skills and proposing tailored training initiatives, this research aims to empower the NCR hotel workforce, enhance career development opportunities, and improve retention strategies within the sector.

Introduction

Employability and productivity are critical focuses for higher education institutions, linked to human capital theories influencing economic performance. As the demand for specialized professionals outstrips supply, developing a strong Employer Branding strategy becomes essential. Education is viewed as a primary mechanism for empowerment, enhancing employability through practical skills. Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) is highlighted as a vital approach to improving graduate employability, necessitating appropriate curricular integration and assessment methods. Despite these efforts, a significant mismatch exists between what is offered by educational institutions and labor market needs, evidenced by low employment rates of recent graduates in the Philippines. Strategies are advised for institutions to enhance competitiveness and align graduates' skills with market demands. Labor turnover statistics from the National Capital Region underline the need for organizations to adapt to high turnover rates, which impacts productivity negatively. The research explores various studies related to talent management practices

and employability skills, observing that nurturing a skilled workforce is indispensable for future growth and competitiveness in the global market. Collaborative efforts among educational institutions, government, and industry are essential to adequately prepare students for the labor market, underscoring the moral responsibility of higher education providers to ensure graduates' readiness for employment.

There are few studies in the local and international setting. However, interms of local setting on how to bridge the gap on what current hospitality industry needs in relevant to the curriculum needed on selected HEI's and SUC's in Metro Manila.

The study of Commey et.al, (2019) showed that there is a need to match the expectations of the industry, however the researcher was conducted in Ghana in the African continent, thus, an evidence gap can be identified. The study suggests reviewing the hospitality curriculum and enhanced the proposed competency-based teaching for the new Technical Universities in Ghana.

A study entitled, Bridging the Employability Gap between Hotels and Graduates: The Immersion Methodology by Hwa (2015), used orthodoxy of theoretical teaching and learning methodology in their HE systems has created a significant gap in industrial expectation of employing individuals who are creative and work ready. Hence, the result shows and suggest that HE learning should evolve from monotonous and rote form of learning to one that is innovatively aligned with industry expectations of graduates' performance and a number of key enablers were identified as necessary for HE to be able to embark on the successful application of the Immersion Methodology.

A study about the Analysis of the Skills Gap in Tourism and Hospitality Industry in Kenya by Francis et.al, (2019) mentioned that most training institution in Kenya have supply led training instead of demand-driven training thereby creating a supply of graduates whose knowledge and skills in not needed in the industry thereby creating a training gap between educators and the industry. The study recommends the involvement of educators and industry practitioners in the training resource persons and enforcement of the National Qualification Framework to ensure standardized curriculum contents in training institutions.

Another study by Sarkodie et.al, (2015), entitled, Bridging the Gap between Hospitality/Tourism Education and Hospitality/Tourism in Ghana shows that graduates are unable to deliver owing to inadequate possession of the generic skills and hence impeded their performance in the industry. The researcher recommended that, there
should be a close collaboration between the educators and the industry players so that students leave school knowing industry expectations.

A study about Supply and Demand of the Entry-Level Job Competencies in the Hotel Industry by Mohamad et al., (2019) aimed to discover the supply and demand of entry-level job competencies, particularly from the perceptions of human resource managers in 4-5 stars hotels. The findings shows that there should be an enhance collaboration between the hospitality industry and universities to bridge the competencies gap of fresh graduates.

Role of Higher Education Institutions

The process of acquiring, developing, and retaining high-potential people is the primary emphasis of talent management, which is a strategic approach to managing human capital. Retaining talent comprehending the socio-demographic characteristics of an organization's workforce can assist in formulating tactics that are more successful in retaining people. The hospitality sector relies heavily on its employees, making talent management procedures vital to its success. As a service industry, the hospitality sector delivers a positive customer experience. Effective talent management practices are crucial for a hotel's performance because the quality of its personnel is directly proportional to the hotel's service level to greater success. The objective of the study is to explore the factors associated with talent management and evaluate the impact of the identified factors on employee productivity in the hospitality industry.

In the Philippines, no less than the Labor Secretary Patricia Sto. Tomas lamented the mismatch between the graduates being produced by the country's universities and colleges and the jobs available. She sees it as one of the factors behind the country's increasing unemployment rate. She stated that job-skill mismatch is a very serious matter that must be addressed and be given sufficient priority if the government is to effectively deal with employment and underemployment problems. (Remollino, 2006) Bennet et al. (2000) opined that a critical issue in examining the employability of graduates is looking into the possibility of embedding employability into the curriculum. They pointed out terminological problems associated with "core" and "generic skills. They settled for using the term "core" for disciplined specific skills and "generic" to represent the so-called transferable skills that

can support study in any discipline. Generally, important matters suggest the identification of four management skills that can be applied across a range of contexts.

The notable findings of a tracer study by Celis and Felicen (2011) revealed that most Tourism graduates, or 76.74%, landed a job related to their course, with a three-month waiting period. However, the research recommended a strong program for enhancement in communication skills for the students to be prepared as front liners in the tourism industry further, that the university must put up a job consultation office to intensify its program on graduates' employability.

Buted (2009) investigated the competency-based curriculum enrichment of HRM Education in the context of Asian Hospitality Business Experiences. He posted that the philosophy of education in Southeast Asian countries ideveloping the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, achieving the fullest potential for all by giving quality education to provide high-quality human resources and to help their students discover their own talents, make the best of these talents and realize their full potential.

Another study was conducted by Fugate et al., (2004) regarding the concept of employability emerges as a crucial contributor to career success. Employability is difficult to define comprehensively and concisely since it is used in a variety of contexts and has a range of meanings (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). Traditionally, it is recognized as the ability to gain and maintain employment both within and across organizations (Finn, 2000). It implies the possession of qualities and competencies that are required to enable graduates to enter and maintain employment throughout their lives. In this definition, employability is clearly a characteristic of the individual. It is a one- dimensional, outcome-based definition that places the individual's skills at the center of the concept (McArdle et al., 2007).

In the same way, Hillage and Pollard (1998) added that: For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (e.g., personal circumstances and labor market environment) within which they seek work.

Research Objectives

After thorough reading and identifying gaps, the following objectives were set forth:

1. To identify key employability skills by determining the critical employability skills needed for the National Capital Region (NCR) hotel industry workforce.

2. To assess the current skills gaps by evaluating the existing skills of the workforce and identify gaps.

3. To develop training programs by designing employability skills training programs tailored to the National Capital Region (NCR) hotel industry.

4. To implement and evaluate programs by implementing the training programs and assess their effectiveness in enhancing employability.

5. To propose p olicy r ecommendations by suggesting policy recommendations to support continuous talent development in the hotel industry.

Methodology

Research Design

The sequential-mixed method was utilized in this study to provide a comprehensive understanding of the employability skills landscape in the National Capital Region (NCR) Hotel Industry. An impactful and equalized analysis of the information as well as to validate the specific information via qualitative data and quantitative sources.

The quantitative phase was the conducted survey among hotel industry employers, employees, training institutions in the National Capital Region (NCR). Stratified random sampling was utilized to ensure representation from various hotel categories (Luxury, Mid-Scale, Budget)

On the other hand, the qualitative phase was conducted b y in-depth interviews with key stakeholders (Hotel Managers, HR Professionals, Training Providers, and employees.) Purposive sampling was utilized to select   participants   with   diverse perspectives.

The study focused on the National Capital Region due to its prominence as a hub for the hotel industry in the Philippines. The respondents were 100 hotel industry employees, and successful alumni who ventures their own business related to Food Service in the National Capital Region (NCR).

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher utilized google form questionnaires and paper-based questionnaires for the quantitative phase, this process depended on the availability of time of the respondents for convenience and fastest way of retrieval through electronic process. For the qualitative data, an interview/ focus group was utilized. Participants were asked by the researcher for their permission to record the group discussion activity for better transcription and interpretation of the information to be collected.

Treatment and Analysis of Data

For the quantitative data, descriptive statistics was used to summarize the data. On the other hand, for qualitative data, thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes and patterns.

Specifically, inferential statistics was used to interpret quantitative data. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) or Regression Analysis was utilized to identify significant factors affecting employability skills. On the other hand, for the qualitative data, triangulation was utilized to cross verify findings from various sources.
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Results and Discussions

Employability skills and workforce impact in terms of core competencies in hospitality

The significance of employability skills in the hospitality sector with all evaluated competencies received a "Strongly Agree" rating. Communication skills rank first (WM = 3.64), highlighting their essential role in delivering quality service. Problem-solving skills follow (WM = 3.46), acknowledging the need for quick decision-making. Technical operations skills (WM = 3.45) also featured prominently, along with adaptability (WM = 3.41) and effective customer service handling (WM = 3.37). The overall average weighted mean of 3.47 indicates a unanimous recognition of the importance of these competencies. The findings align with various human resource development theories, emphasizing the need for skill investment to enhance service quality and organizational productivity, particularly in fast-paced hospitality environments.

Employability skills and workforce impact in terms of core skill gaps and workforce readiness

The perceived core skill gaps in the hospitality sector, with a consensus indicating significant challenges in workforce readiness. Key findings include employer-reported deficiencies (WM = 3.44) affecting operational efficiency, and the impact of skill gaps on job performance and guest satisfaction (WM = 3.34). The frequency of skill-related challenges (WM = 3.31) points to disruptions in daily operations, while equal concerns from employers and employees (WM = 3.28) highlight the need for further development. The overall average weighted mean of 3.33 signifies a persistent worry regarding workforce readiness, suggesting the need for targeted training and curriculum enhancements. The findings align with several theoretical frameworks: Human Capital Theory emphasizes the importance of skill investment, Skill Gap Theory highlights the skills discrepancy, Competency-Based Education calls for industry-aligned curricula, and Change Management Theories stress the need for continuous workforce development. Collectively, these results advocate for strategic interventions to bridge skill gaps and improve readiness in the hospitality sector.

Employability skills and workforce impact in terms of training program effectiveness

The assessment of hospitality workforce training programs reveals a generally negative perception, with all indicators receiving a "Disagree" rating. Completion rates (WM = 2.38) are low due to potential issues like scheduling and relevance, while

improvements in employee performance (WM = 2.36) and trainee satisfaction (WM = 2.35) are similarly lacking. Retention rates (WM = 2.29) and employer feedback (WM = 2.25) indicate disconnects between training objectives and outcomes, with an average weighted mean of 2.33. This dissatisfaction correlates with the Kirkpatrick Model of Training Evaluation, denoting ineffective behavioral change and organizational benefits. Constructivist Learning Theory also highlights issues of relevance and engagement in training content, while Skill Development Theory points to a misalignment with workplace competencies. Thus, a re-evaluation of training frameworks is necessary, focusing on industry relevance and learner-centered methodologies for effective workforce development in hospitality.

Employability skills and workforce impact in terms of employer expectations and industry standards

Limited alignment revealed between employer expectations and industry competency frameworks in the hospitality sector, with only one indicator achieving a moderate "Agree" rating. Key issues include a disconnect between theoretical standards and hiring practices, low employer satisfaction with entry-level competencies, and insufficient employer-led training initiatives. This situation indicates a broader inadequacy and emphasizes the need for collaboration between academia and industry to co-develop curricula and improve training programs. The Person-Environment Fit Theory highlights the misalignment causing decreased effectiveness, while the Stakeholder Theory and Competency-Based Education Model stress the importance of academic-industry partnerships. Additionally, the Diffusion of Innovations Theory points to the slow adoption of new training practices. Overall, enhancing workforce readiness requires synchronizing educational programs with industry standards and fostering proactive engagement in training initiatives.

Employability skills and workforce impact in terms of career development and retention strategies

The career development and retention strategies revealed positive impact on employability in the hospitality workforce, with most indicators receiving a "Strongly Agree" rating. Key findings include a strong emphasis on merit-based promotion linked to skill development (WM = 3.42), which reflects the importance of upskilling for advancement. Retention rates improve with structured career development plans (WM = 3.37), and long-term employer investment fosters workforce stability (WM = 3.36). Employee perceptions of growth opportunities (WM = 3.32) are optimistic but indicate a need for better communication about advancement paths. A gap is highlighted in mentorship effectiveness (WM = 3.15), suggesting improvements are necessary. The analysis incorporates theories like Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Career Development Theory, indicating that clear career pathways and effective mentorship are pivotal for enhancing employee loyalty and reducing turnover. Organizations should prioritize improving mentorship and communication to maximize employability and benefit from their human capital.

Employability skills influence to workforce empowerment in the NCR hotel Industry

Manager 1: Employability skills enhance employees' confidence and competence, enabling them to take on more responsibilities and contribute effectively to hotel operations.

Manager 2: Strong employability skills foster a sense of autonomy among hotel staff, empowering them to make informed decisions that improve guest experiences.

Manager 3: The development of communication and interpersonal skills allows employees to collaborate efficiently, leading to a more cohesive and empowered workforce.

Manager 4: Employability skills such as problem-solving and adaptability enable hotel employees to handle challenges proactively, increasing their sense of control and empowerment.

Manager 5: When employees possess technical skills relevant to their roles, they are more capable of performing tasks independently, which boosts overall workforce empowerment.

Manager 6: Training in customer service and hospitality skills equips employees to deliver high- quality service, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment in their roles.

Manager 7: Employability skills contribute to a positive work environment by promoting professionalism and mutual respect, which in turn empowers employees to excel.

Manager 8: The continuous development of employability skills encourages a culture of learning and growth, empowering employees to advance their careers within the industry.

Manager 9: Skilled employees are better equipped to innovate and suggest improvements, thereby actively participating in the hotel's success and feeling empowered.

Manager 10: Overall, employability skills serve as a foundation for workforce empowerment by enabling hotel staff to perform confidently, make decisions independently, and contribute meaningfully to organizational goals.

Training program effectiveness and workforce employability in terms curriculum relevance and alignment

The effectiveness of training programs in the hospitality sector regarding curriculum relevance and alignment with workforce needs showed a consensus of Strongly Agree (SA) across all indicators. The highest rated indicator is "Alignment of training content with industry needs and job roles" (WM = 3.42), indicating strong agreement that curricula reflect operational requirements. Subsequent indicators emphasize the importance of experiential learning and perceptions of training relevance to job functions. The overall average weighted mean is 3.37, highlighting curriculum responsiveness to industry trends, though opportunities for improvement exist. The findings align with educational theories such as Constructivist Learning Theory, Adult Learning Theory, Curriculum Theory and Development, and Stakeholder Theory, all underscoring the importance of real-world applications, continuous improvement, and alignment with competency-based education to ensure workforce readiness and adaptability.

Training program effectiveness and workforce employability in terms skill acquisition and application

The effectiveness of training programs in the hospitality sector, highlighted strong consensus on their contribution to skill acquisition and application. Key indicators such as "Improvement in employee competency levels post-training" (WM = 3.43) and "Frequency of skill reinforcement" (WM = 3.38) underscore the success of training. Observations of skill utilization (WM = 3.37) and employee confidence (WM = 3.36) further support the practical value of training. The findings align with the Kirkpatrick Model and experiential learning theories, indicating that effective training not only enhances knowledge but also facilitates skill transfer into workplace behavior. Continuous reinforcement is essential for confidence and competence, leading to operational excellence in the hospitality industry.

Training program effectiveness and workforce employability in terms of program impact on career progression

There is a positive impact of training programs on career progression and employability in the hospitality sector, with all indicators rated as Strongly Agree (SA). The highest score, "Percentage of employees advancing post-training" (WM = 3.54), highlights the belief that training supports upward mobility. Other significant indicators include "Employer recognition of training in promotions" (WM = 3.42) and "Employee perceptions of training impact" (WM = 3.38), underscoring the acknowledgment of training in performance evaluations and its perceived link to career growth. The correlation between training participation and salary increases (WM = 3.37) and long-term career outcomes (WM = 3.33) further affirms the economic benefits of sustained learning, leading to increased retention and satisfaction.

These findings relate to various career development theories: Human Capital Theory suggests that training enhances employee skills and productivity, while Expectancy Theory indicates that perceived training benefits motivate employees to engage in learning. Social Cognitive Career Theory emphasizes self-efficacy, as positive training perceptions foster a belief in advancement through skill development. Additionally, the implications for talent management and succession planning highlight training's role in creating a strong leadership pipeline. Overall, these theories collectively demonstrate how training investments catalyze career progression, enhance organizational talent development, and reinforce favorable perceptions in the hospitality industry.

Training program effectiveness and workforce employability in terms of continuous improvement and policy support

The significant impact of continuous improvement and policy support on training program effectiveness and workforce employability in the hospitality sector was highlighted. All indicators received a Strongly Agree rating, indicating stakeholder consensus on the importance of institutional responsiveness and policy alignment for skill development. The highest-rated item emphasizes the necessity of frequent training revisions based on feedback (WM = 3.45), reflecting adaptive training design. Effective policy-driven incentives (WM = 3.39) rank second, motivating skill-building among employers and employees. The adoption of best practices from global models (WM = 3.34) supports local training quality through benchmarking. Government or industry support (WM = 3.28) highlights public-private collaboration's role, while employer investment in ongoing development (WM = 3.27) stresses organizational commitment to employee growth. Overall, a weighted mean of 3.35 confirms that dynamic, feedback-informed training systems supported by proactive policies are vital for long-term employability in the hospitality industry.

The insights align with various theoretical frameworks, including Continuous Improvement Theory, Institutional Theory, Benchmarking Theory, Public-Private Partnership Theory, and Organizational Learning Theory, emphasizing the need for adaptive and collaborative training systems to cultivate a resilient workforce.

Table 1
Significant relationship between the employability skills and workforce impact and training program effectiveness and workforce employability

Indicators	Mean	SD	Pearson r	Computed t-value	P-value
Employability Skills and Workforce Impact	2.98	0.42	0.73	12.11	0.00
Training Program Effectiveness and Workforce Employability	3.33	0.37	High Relationship		
			Decision	**Reject Null Hypothesis**	
			Remarks	**Significant**	
			Level of Significance (a)	**0.05 or 5%**	

Table 1 presents a statistical analysis highlighting a strong positive correlation (r = 0.73) between training program effectiveness and workforce employability in the hospitality sector. The significant t-value of 12.11 and a p-value of 0.00 reject the null hypothesis of no relationship, indicating that improved training is closely linked to enhanced employability and workforce performance. Means of 2.98 (employability skills) and 3.33 (training effectiveness) with narrow standard deviations suggest consistent perceptions among respondents. This relationship underscores the necessity of effective training programs in fostering employee competencies, aligning with theories such as Human Capital Theory, Training Transfer Theory, and Kirkpatrick's Model. The findings advocate for ongoing investment in structured training to ensure workforce adaptability and performance excellence, affirming the critical role of training in the hospitality industry's labor force development.

The challenges hotel industry professionals face in acquiring and applying employability skills, and training programs recommendations

*Manager 1***:** Hotel industry professionals often face challenges in developing soft skills such as communication and customer service due to limited practical training opportunities. Training programs can address this by incorporating role- playing and real-world simulations to build confidence and competence.

Manager 2: A significant challenge is the rapid technological advancement, which requires staff to continuously update their digital skills. Regular, up- to-date training modules can help professionals stay current and effectively utilize new hotel management systems.

Manager 3: Many professionals struggle with adaptability and problem-solving in dynamic hotel environments. Customized training that emphasizes scenario- based learning can enhance these skills, enabling staff to respond effectively to unforeseen situations.

Manager 4: Language barriers and cultural sensitivity are often overlooked in skill development. Multilingual training sessions and cultural awareness programs can improve communication and guest satisfaction.

Manager 5: Limited access to ongoing professional development can hinder skill application. Establishing continuous learning programs within hotels encourages staff to regularly upgrade their skills and stay motivated.

Manager 6: Time constraints and workload pressures can impede skill acquisition. Flexible, modular training programs that fit into busy schedules can ensure consistent skill development without disrupting operations.

Manager 7: Inadequate training in leadership and team management can affect overall service quality. Leadership development workshops can prepare staff for supervisory roles and foster a collaborative work environment.

Manager 8: The gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application remains a challenge. Experiential learning opportunities, such as internships and on-the-job training, can bridge this divide effectively.

Manager 9: High staff turnover in the hotel industry can lead to skill gaps. Implementing comprehensive onboarding and ongoing training programs can ensure new employees quickly acquire necessary skills.

Manager 10: Finally, a lack of awareness about the importance of employability skills can hinder development efforts. Awareness campaigns and motivational sessions can emphasize the value of continuous skill enhancement for career growth.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the researcher concluded that:

1. Employability skills are foundational to workforce empowerment, particularly in a service-driven sector such as hospitality. The alignment of these skills with organizational values and service expectations is instrumental in recruitment, retention, and employee advancement.
2. Training programs that are accessible, context-specific, and competency- based produce measurable impacts on both individual career trajectories and organizational performance. Employees with access to structured and relevant training demonstrated higher perceptions of readiness and confidence.
3. Skill misalignment and underinvestment in professional development opportunities remain key barriers to sustained workforce readiness. Without systemic efforts to close training gaps and support employee progression, the hotel industry may face limitations in retaining skilled personnel and fostering innovation.
4. Collaboration between academic institutions and industry stakeholders is essential to ensure that training programs evolve in step with workplace realities.

Recommendations

1. *Revise and Contextualize Curriculum Content.* Training institutions should periodically review course content to include current hospitality trends, soft skills, and digital competencies. This includes integrating situational simulations, role-play modules, and problem-based learning to bridge academic theory and practice.

2. *Strengthen Hotel–Academe Linkages.* Establish formal partnerships through internship programs, guest lectures by industry experts, and curriculum co-development initiatives. This would create a feedback loop that ensures continuous curriculum responsiveness to workforce needs.

3. *Promote Scalable and Inclusive Training Formats.* Invest in hybrid delivery models (online and in-person) to enhance accessibility, especially for frontline staff who may face time or location constraints. These formats should allow for modular certifications that stick toward comprehensive qualification pathways.

4. *Institutionalize Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms.* Regularly assess the effectiveness of training programs using employee feedback, performance reviews, and productivity metrics. Incorporate real-time adjustments to ensure ongoing relevance and efficacy of program content.

5. *Advocate for Policy Support and Incentives.* Lobby for national or local policies that offer tax incentives to businesses investing in employee development. Government-led grants or public-private partnerships can also expand opportunities for small- and mid-sized hotels to access high-quality training initiatives.

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