INDUSTRIAL EXPOSURE TRAINING IN HOTELS AND ITS IMPACT ON UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS – CHALLENGES AND REMEDIES

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ABSTRACT

Hospitality industry is a highly guest service-oriented business, where communication between employees and guests determine the success of the business. Hotel industry as one of the biggest service industry is always in demand for human skill and expertise. A study conducted by an industry chamber located in New Delhi reveals that the attrition rate in the hospitality industry in India is set to double to nearly 50 per cent by 2010, up from the earlier 25 per cent growing at an alarming rate of 10 per cent per annum. The Students, who take part in the Industrial Exposure Training as part of their curriculum, should have a good reception on their interactions with the industry. The goal of IET is to expose the students to the actual working environment and to gain practical knowledge and skills. Positive workplace encounters will motivate, develop and build their confidence.

As the saying goes, First impressions are the best impressions; IET is likely to be the most influential part of the person’s career. Work force crunch is forcing managers/supervisors to view them as replacements rather than trainees.

IET programmes should focus on developing their skills rather than eyeing them as a manpower replacement. If the managers/supervisors are unable or unwilling to develop the skills young trainees need to perform effectively, the latter will set lower standards than they are capable of achieving, their self-images will be impaired. Since the chances of building successful careers in the industry will decline, the trainees will leave in hope of finding other opportunities. If on the other hand, first managers/supervisors help trainees achieve maximum potential, they will build the foundations for a successful career.

In real scenario, many hotels fail to build a positive impression of the industry in the young talent which will develop negative attitude towards their training, industry and in all probabilities their own career in the industry.
This paper aims to project the challenges the student faces in onboarding the industry during his/her IET tenure and proposes solutions for hotels and the institutes to overcome any negative perceptions of the student towards his career in the industry.

**Keywords**: Training, Industrial Exposure Training, Attrition, Onboarding, Career, IET Programme

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1. INTRODUCTION

Industrial Exposure Training is part of curriculum for the students enrolled in under graduate programs of Indian Universities. The duration prescribed by various universities ranges between 18 weeks to 24 weeks.

The main objective of this program is

- To improve the Students’ employability skills and ensure smooth onboarding to their careers.
- It helps them to translate the knowledge gained from the institute to be put to practice.
- Helps them gain work related skills and expertise related to their future careers.
- Real work situations enable them to establish their career goals.

World travel and tourism council (WTTC) ranks India as the 7th largest tourism economy. Hospitality industry falls under the umbrella of Tourism industry as well as the service sector. Being part of the service sector its success lies on the providing best services to the guest. Quality manpower is required to understand and work with many intangible and tangible aspects associated with services. Hotel management institutes facilitate students to work in various kitchens and department labs. These labs equip the students with basic skills and knowledge of operational departments such as Food Production, Food and beverage service, Housekeeping and front office. Basic managerial training is imparted on sales and marketing, facility planning, cost accounting and financial analysis, human resource management, Hotel Law and so on as the student progresses towards course completion. (Ashaq Hussain Nazar)

At present, there are 41 Institutes of Hotel Management comprising of 21 Central IHMs, 8 State IHMs and 12 Private IHMs and 5 Food Craft Institutes following National Council’s course curriculum. These institutes were set up as autonomous societies with a specific mandate to impart / conduct hospitality education / training in hospitality skills. Following these footsteps many private institutes have mushroomed to meet the evergrowing manpower demands of the industry. Students enrolled into graduation program will get an opportunity to demonstrate their skills and apply their learning in hotels. However, various factors contribute to the student dissatisfaction of the training program which are discussed in this paper.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following means were used to collect and analyse data:

1. Structured questionnaire distributed to outgoing students of IET
2. Personal interviews with outgoing IET students

The data thus collected, from a set of about 40 students was analyzed objectively.
LITERATURE REVIEW
A research article published by NCHMCT, MOT, Government of India (2013), studied IHM students behavior towards industrial training. A sample survey of 100 students of IHM Dehradun, viewed that the industry is unable to meet the expectations of students during their training which becomes a deciding factor for them about their careers. The paper proposes certain strategies and suggestions for betterment of curriculum and upliftment of moral of students.

Dr. Babita Jha and Amit datta (2015) did a study on industrial training and its consequences on the career perceptions. This study reveals that overall under graduate students who are studying hotel management highly disagree what the industry offers them in choosing a future career.

Sunder Srinivasan, Rajeshree pol (2014), A Study on importance of industrial training as part of hotel management education curriculum, as perceived by industry and students. In this study industry personnel view that the students have right attitude and ethics towards work. Student feedback stated that there was knowledge satisfaction from training as well.

3. OBSERVATIONS FROM THE RESEARCH
Upon analyzing the students’ response to the questionnaire, and the inputs from personal interviews, the following factors were identified as the main reasons causing dissatisfaction among students.

A. Factors from the IET that contribute to student dissatisfaction

1. Content-related causes

a) Direct interaction with guests is curbed
One of the aspects that the students eagerly look forward to in the IET, for which they have been specially trained in the past 1.5 years of education is guest interaction. Their grooming and communication skills are specifically addressed to gear them towards cordial and effective interaction with guests, the ultimate purpose of hospitality industry. However, this particular aspect has been the largest source of dissatisfaction for the student trainees. This is because many managers feel it is too risky to allow trainees to interact with guests directly. Hence they are asked to either simply look and observe, or worse – spend their time on menial tasks. This limiting factor leads to disappointment and frustration among several eager and motivated trainees.

b) Monotonous, unchallenging job tasks
It has been observed that the students are often assigned monotonous and unchallenging job tasks which do not cover the large spectrum of what they have been learning over the past few years. Several students find themselves doing menial job tasks for most part of their IET, for which they feel under-utilized.

c) Outdated curriculum – large discrepancy between what is taught in the institute and what is practiced in reality.
A number of students also reported back that they were affected by the difference between theory and practice. This discrepancy reduces their level of confidence in what they have learnt, and what they are able to effectively apply in the new environment. Sometimes they suffer a large setback in the form of lack of self-trust and hence they readily resort themselves to menial tasks.
d) Campus placement officer has very little influence in steering the course of the IET.
Once the student leaves campus, he/she feels temporarily detached, sometimes even abandoned by the parent institute, having to face the harsh reality of the industry by his/her own. Although students are assigned personnel in learning departments in the hotel whom they can approach with their grievances, they are not able to freely do so. This is due to fear of repercussions and general lack of confidence in the new environment. There is no formal procedure in place to allow for a periodic, personalized check of the student’s progress and general well-being, besides filling a mandatory logbook.

2. Personal aspects:

a) Students feel treated as menial laborers as opposed to management trainees, sometimes even having to face verbal abuse from hotel employees.
Several students have reported to have encountered their harsh reality-check in the first few days of their IET, in the form of verbal abuse from supposed-to-be supervisors/coaches. The general attitude of hotel staff towards the trainees seems inappropriate. They tend to treat them not as future colleagues as should be the case, but rather as menial laborers, to whom they can push away their most lowly tasks like – carrying luggage etc.

b) Long working hours, especially during peak periods.
Despite being given unchallenging job tasks not befitting their training, students also find that they are overworked with such tasks. This happens often during peak periods like festivals etc, during which regular staff members request leave-of-absence. Thus trainees suddenly find themselves putting in more hours of work on their own during these periods, for jobtasks for which they are either insufficiently trained, or over-qualified.

c) Unfitting monetary benefits
In several cases, students feel that they are not sufficiently compensated for either the quality or quantity of work they are expected to put in during their IETs. A trainee typically gets paid <20% of a regular employee which many feel is unfair.

d) Lack of personal motivating factors during the period of IET.
Some students report feeling demoralized during their IET because of several reasons, some of which are mentioned above. A proven way to cope with setbacks and continue to deliver with passion is by means of a rewards/personal recognition system. This has the added benefit of instilling a sense of healthy competition among peers. However, it has been observed that such a recognition is not existent in the IETs.

3. External factors:

a) Attractive opportunities from other rapidly-growing industries
Being a rapidly developing economy, semi-skilled labor is constantly on demand in big cities, offering attractive remuneration. Hotel Management students, with specific emphasis on grooming and communication skills are an attractive pool of workforce for several industries such as IT, BPO etc. Although this external factor cannot be influenced from within the hospitality industry, the consequences of this can be addressed to an extent by paying attention to the next mentioned factor.
b) Lack of a sense of pride for being a part of hospitality industry

In general, it has been observed that students lack a sense of pride for being a part of the hospitality industry. A large majority of the students seem to be indifferent to the type of industry they work in. There seems to be no differentiation, or USP (unique selling proposition) for being a part of hospitality services industry, as opposed to others like IT. Both the parent institution as well as the receiving hotel industry can play a large part in instilling this sense of pride in the student.

B. Proposed remedies to address the issue

a) Phased interactions with guests.

This is a valuable exposure which the parent institute is unable to provide in the educational environment. Hence interaction with guests, at varied levels is strongly recommended during the program. As described in section, the daily supervisor can play an important role in ensuring that the student can have a positive interaction with the guests. For example, a short introduction like ‘Please meet our trainee Mr./Ms. XX, would you kindly bear with us while he/she does his first check-in?’ is usually appreciated by guests, and will be seen as a sign of an institution that cares for the development of its personnel. Therefore, instead of risking a bad guest experience, it can be a pleasant interaction for both the guests and the student.

b) Improved role of the daily supervisor in the on-job training process of the student

The daily supervisor to whom the student reports to at a given period (this may vary week to week) plays a very important role in the learning experience of the student. It is reported by many students that this critical role is often overlooked in the program. The supervisor has neither the time nor the motivation to impart essential skills onto the student. This is largely due to the rigid workload on the supervisor irrespective of the fact that he/she is also expected to train/coach the student during the working hours. Therefore it is proposed that this aspect of workload while supervising must be discussed beforehand with the learning and scheduling departments of the hotel. The supervisors must realize the significance of their role in the student training and overall experience of the student. They must be asked to treat the students as their prospective future colleagues, and not as menial laborers. Their workload should also give them enough time to impart skills training while on the job.

In the first few days, as the student is completely new to the role and the expectations are unclear, the supervisor can let the trainee observe and learn. As the trainee becomes familiar to the job tasks, he/she can be given more responsibility and variety in the type of jobs that he/she can deliver. This will also eventually ease the workload of the supervisor and increase the exposure to the student to the full range of job tasks.

c) Learning institute must strive to keep their curriculum up-to-date.

This will make the experiences and learnings from the IET more valuable for the students. Also, this will save them significant frustration and make them realize that what they learnt over the past years is actually worthwhile in reality.

d) Increased involvement of the campus placement officer on the trainees’ progress

To address the issue mentioned in section 0, it is proposed to conduct regular (monthly) three-way, structured progress checks between the hotel learning department representative, the placement officer from the college and the student. This personal interaction can increase the student’s confidence in the program and makes him/her at ease to share any specific issues.
he/she may be facing. This also gives the opportunity for the people involved to address the issue immediately, instead of letting it simmer for prolonged periods.

e) Adjust remuneration/stipend to better reflect the workload and jobtasks
Remuneration also plays a significant role in recognizing the efforts and output of the student. As it is a certainty that students are expected to put in same hours, if not more than regular staff, their stipend should also reflect this. Students feel that the hotels are taking advantage of the situation as IET must be completed for award of their graduation. The same students performing similar tasks are paid more if they are covering specifically for understaffed periods specifically for banquets.

f) Increase personal motivation of trainees through trainee recognition program
Several students reported back that they feel inadequately recognized during their training. This leads to lack of motivation, diminished sense of pride, and a poor overall experience. This can be easily remedied, also considering that they are still in the early learning phase as part of their education. A regular and structured assessment of the individual student’s performance, with inputs from the respective daily supervisors can form the basis for a monthly recognition program. It is proposed that the benefit from such an initiative will far exceed the effort involved. This will serve several purposes:

a. Keeping the motivational levels of the students high,
b. Improve the overall performance by instilling a sense of healthy competitive spirit among the students (Who will be the next ‘best trainee of the month’?)
c. Instill a sense of pride for being a part of this industry.

4. CONCLUSIONS
Hotel industry as a whole needs to come to the realization that first impressions must focus on motivating the students to building careers with hotel industry. Hotels are unable to make the most of the readily available trained manpower. The effort needed to make the IET more effective and positive is rather small compared to dealing with the overall effects of attrition, as highlighted above. Hence it is advised that the hotel industry takes a much longer term view on the impact of the IET, and be prepared to forego some medium-to-short term benefits of IET students like cheap labor, coverage during lean periods etc. It is therefore concluded that both the parent institute training the future professional as well as the receiving hotel review their roles and the content of the IET and make it a more worthwhile and positive contributor to retaining the future workforce in the industry.

The hotels are finding it difficult to retain the students in this sector. However if the transition and on boarding is successful, the industry will not be losing them to other sectors such as BPO’s, facility planning & event management companies, and other service industries.

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