Charting the course for student success: harnessing the potential of an accreditation-focused hospitality student-exit survey

Received 5 July 2023
Revised 12 October 2023
Accepted 12 October 2023

Melvin R. Weber and Craig Marshall
School of Hospitality Leadership, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina, USA
Sydney Pons
School of Hospitality Management, Penn State University, University Park, Pennsylvania, USA, and
Ruth Annette Smith
Department of Hospitality Management, Bethune-Cookman University, Daytona Beach, Florida, USA

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this research is two-fold: first, the researchers will create a reliable and valid hospitality senior exit survey by conducting a Delphi panel of experts and second, the researchers will pilot-test the instrument with students from a four-year university. The data will be (a) assessed to determine the retention of knowledge by four-year students, (b) used by academicians to make changes to course material and (c) used to help with the accreditation assessment process.

Design/methodology/approach – A Delphi panel of hospitality educators was used to validate the items, and graduating hospitality students were used to calculate reliability.

Findings – By embracing the hospitality exit survey (HES), institutions can effectively evaluate and enhance their programs. With its ability to gauge students' knowledge retention, the study findings serve as a powerful tool for shaping the future of hospitality education.

Research limitations/implications – The study's findings might be somewhat limited in representing a broader range of perspectives within hospitality programs. Another limitation stems from the structure of the survey itself. The survey included numerous items requiring two inputs for each item. This format has the potential to introduce certain biases among participants.

Practical implications – In a positive statement, organizations can use this information to discover why employees stay and then continue to develop goals/strategies to ensure this process stays up to date. Academia is no different. Academia also wants to produce the best product, and since the students are to become the next set of leaders, these programs need to know what is successful and what needs to be adjusted.

Social implications – A strategic exit interview program should 1)Uncover issues relating to human resources/students; 2) understand employees'/students' perception of the work; 3) managers'/directors' leadership style and effectiveness; 4) human resource/college/departments benchmarks and 5) improve the organization.

Originality/value – This research holds significant importance as it focuses on developing the senior HES and its potential utilization within hospitality programs. The HES serves as a valuable tool for these programs

This study was registered with the Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB 20-000703). There are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

International Hospitality Review
Vol. 39 No. 2, 2025
pp. 197-209
Emerald Publishing Limited
2516-8142
DOI 10.1108/IHR-07-2023-0039

to evaluate the knowledge levels of their graduating students and collect data necessary for assessment and accreditation purposes.

Keywords Hospitality management, Exit interviews, Retention, Accreditation, Student assessment
Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Today, in a knowledge-driven society, where the retention of information is very valuable, academia stands at the forefront and is dedicated to empowering students to absorb and retain information. The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) has developed the college senior survey (CSS) and administers it on an annual basis through the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the University of California, Los Angeles. This survey is typically administered to graduating college students as a final, data-gathering survey. This survey can be a valuable source of students' academic achievements and campus experiences (Franke, Ruiz, Sharkness, DeAngelo, & Pryor, 2010). The assessment is another important reason for this senior retention survey, and it is especially useful for tracking accreditation results. This project aims to develop a Hospitality Exit Survey (HES) for final-year students in the hospitality industry.

The benefits of implementing a senior exit survey within hospitality programs are geared towards understanding what knowledge students retain upon graduation, opportunities to improve courses and data collection to streamline assessment data for accreditation purposes. In an era marked by the remarkable change in the hospitality industry, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, this hospitality exit survey (HES) assumes an even greater significance, serving as a valuable asset to hospitality programs seeking to adapt and thrive in an evolving era. By harnessing the insights garnered from the survey, hospitality programs can proactively align their curricula with the demands of the industry while equipping graduates with the knowledge essential for success.

Student knowledge retention and course improvement benefits are twofold, manifesting in two distinct ways or yielding dual advantages. For example, the HES could also be used to understand what knowledge hospitality students are not retaining at the end of their academic tenure. This knowledge gap would then allow hospitality programs to adjust their course concepts to better prepare future hospitality leaders entering the workforce. Besides adapting hospitality curricula, individual instructors could make adjustments within their course/courses. By implementing these adjustments, hospitality students can improve their retention of valuable knowledge, thus enhancing their marketability to hospitality organizations.

The final benefit of the HES is accreditation, especially accreditation reporting criteria. Accreditation agencies want a robust data tracking system to show that the program is preparing knowledgeable students (or future leaders). By implementing the HES as part of this tracking system, hospitality programs will be able to show their successes and areas of opportunities. These hospitality programs can then state the changes to the overall curricula and individual courses to prove their intentions of educating a knowledgeable hospitality leader. Many exit surveys and senior surveys exist, but few focus on hospitality-specific knowledge if any at all (Franke *et al.*, 2010).

The purpose of this research is two-fold. First, the researchers will create a reliable and valid hospitality senior exit survey by conducting a Delphi panel of experts. Second, the researchers will pilot-test the instrument with students from a four-year university. The data will be (a) assessed to determine the retention of knowledge by four-year students, (b) used by academicians to make changes to course material and (c) used to help with the accreditation assessment process. We hope that our study will serve as a powerful tool for shaping the future of hospitality education with its ability to measure student knowledge retention.

Literature review

Educators are concerned with techniques that develop students' skills, abilities and knowledge and their inherent potential. In today's post-Covid world, educators are challenged with multi-faceted and sometimes complex situations. These instructors/educators should consider the blend of emotional, societal and peer pressure of students. The goal of educators is to develop individual students and to enhance the professional/educational talent of their students (Chandler, Weber, Finley, & Evans, 2008). With this goal in mind, our project explores how educators can effectively measure their progress in achieving this high objective. Surveys and traditional examinations aim to correctly determine whether students have grasped the information delivered intermittently throughout their time in individual courses. Thus, this senior exit survey could benefit a hospitality program and the adjustments to the overall curricula.

Within the classroom, it is the instructor's responsibility to help students succeed. Student success is achieved through the utilization of testing and assessment methods, often taking the form of conventional methods such as traditional paper and pencil examinations. This type of assessment presents students with a mixture of matching questions, true/false questions, multiple-choice questions, or open-ended short-answer questions. In today's Covid-19 world, this assessment is often completed via distance education and/or through the university's learning management system (LMS), such as Canvas, Moodle and Blackboard.

Bloom's taxonomy – complexity of questions

One way to assess the complexity of test items is to use Bloom's Taxonomy. This taxonomy was developed by Dr Benjamin Bloom (1956) and his team of educational psychologists, who helped build this classification to analyze the complexity of test questions and test behaviors critical to learning. This group of psychologists saw this categorization as more than a guideline for developing tests/examinations. They wanted it to be a common language about learning objectives to assist with interactions between people, with all topics of education and with grade levels of students. They intended to determine a curriculum with a comprehensive educational focus, such as those being used in national, state, or local standards. This taxonomy could help compare educational activities and assessments within academic curriculums. Bloom's Taxonomy has the potential to provide a range of educational opportunities within a range of educational courses or curricula (Krathwohl, 2002). The six categories are: 1) knowledge, 2) comprehension, 3) application, 4) analysis, 5) synthesis and 6) evaluation. These levels were ordered from simplest to complex, then definitive to abstract. One crucial assumption was the mastery of the cumulative hierarchy of the taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002). Considering the intricate elements of complexity involved in testing questions and behaviors, it was determined that Bloom's Taxonomy would be beneficial in understanding student retention of course materials across various hospitality courses and educators.

Exit interviews

The exit interview is another assessment tool and is completed by written response, oral response (recorded with interviewee permission), or online. Traditionally, the exit interview is used to appraise employee knowledge within the company/organization and recognize possibilities for improving retention or engagement. The exit interview is a conversation between an organizational human resource manager and a departing employee (voluntary or non-voluntary) to determine why the person is leaving the organization. These interviews allow a human resource manager to delve into aspects happening within the workplace, whether cultural issues, day-to-day procedures, management explanations, or employee morale. The success of an exit interview should be determined by the constructive changes they generate. Exit interviews can provide organizations with data helping them respond to opportunities in the workplace, such as decreasing employee turnover, validating the selection process and strengthening training/development programs (Morrow, Jackson, Disch, & Mood, 2011; Purdue, Woods, Elsworth, & Ninemeier, 2003; Westcott, 2006). Useful exit interviews deliver solutions to turnover based on employees' perceptions of being hired, their training process, their pay/benefits, the actual job, possible career paths, various leadership/management styles, or optional work possibilities (Gordon, 1990). These exit interviews may allow the organization to retain seasonal employees, a crucial aspect of hospitality businesses (Kleiman, 2005).

Additionally, these exit interviews have the potential to assess an organization's ethical environment (Giacalone, Jurkiewicz, & Knouse, 2003) since terminated employees give an abundance of impressions gathered over their tenure at the organization (Kransdorff, 1995). Most exit interviews should focus on six overall goals: 1) uncovering issues related to HR, 2) understanding employee's perceptions, 3) achieving insight into leadership styles and their effectiveness, 4) learning about benchmarks, 5) fostering innovation for improvement and 6) creating lifelong advocates. This strategy has positive intentions; however, exit interviews have several advantages and disadvantages to consider (*Exit interviews: Your ultimate guide, 2023*).

Exit interviews are typically more conversational than ordinary interviews, making them less intimidating. Conducting exit interviews allows the interviewer to guide the conversation as needed and enables them to focus on the questions and clarify information. These interviews allow HR to gain information about turnover/retention, which could increase the retention rate. Exit interviews are an excellent method for getting ideas about additional training and other insights that could be useful within the organization. The interviews are a chance to ask employees or students any details about the organization. Exit surveys serve as the ultimate avenue of recourse, focusing not on preventing employees from leaving the organization but rather on seizing the opportunity to acquire valuable insights. Through these surveys, organizations can enhance their ability to retain talented employees, rectify flawed hiring practices, refine management procedures and ultimately bolster organizational performance (Miller, 2018).

One significant disadvantage of exit interviews is the perception of exiting employees that their feedback does not matter. If they were disengaged because they felt misheard, misunderstood, or overlooked, they might think their feedback was pointless. Exit interviews can also be considered pointless if no follow-up process is set in place and no changes are made using the information. If there is no formal structure/process to follow for step-by-step improvements, these exit interviews are ineffective (Wickham, 2021). Exit interviews often fail because of data quality and a lack of consensus. The usefulness of these interviews depends on the quality of the received data. If departing employees are not honest and forthright, dependable data is not obtained. The goals, strategies and execution of these interviews vary widely, and the findings and recommendations are vague and conflicting (Spain & Groysberg, 2016).

The information gathered in an exit interview can give an organization a distinct view on employees' performance and satisfaction. Employees that leave may be honest about their experiences without fear of instant consequences. Also probable, these employees may have been subjected to other employers who offer useful awareness into how the organization conducting the interview compares to competitors. In industry, the information gathered on why employees leave should be vital to an organization's strategic planning process. An organization can use the findings of exit interviews to decrease costly turnover and improve staff productivity and employee engagement. Metrics, benchmarks and best practices help businesses explain and use this data to build practical organizational retention programs. Collecting essential exit interview data can enhance organizational effectiveness, contributing to high-performing businesses. Furthermore, they can enable an organization to consider changes in trends allowing assessment of HR policies (Frase-Blunt, 2004).

In New Zealand, data from research findings on exit interviews has been gathered to represent the growth of the organization within multiple hotels. Human resource management collated all exit interview data at the end of each month for regional offices to analyze. It was found that the seniority of employees that left was greatly influenced by whether they were part-time or full-time and more part-time employees left than full-time employees. Another clear trend was that more than half of all employees stated that "nothing" could have been done to stop them from leaving. A large percentage of employees stated that they enjoyed working for the hotel; however, the real problem is that most respondents did not give any feedback about what could be done differently to improve retention. Some staff indicated communication, staffing levels, pay and training were all retention problems, but the percentages attached to those issues were very low (Williams, Harris, & Parker, 2008). Drawing inspiration from strategic human resource management practices, we posit that exit interview methodology could prove advantageous when applied to students who are effectively transitioning out of the university, such as graduating seniors.

Exit interviews in higher education

Higher education institutions want to increase their student retention; they can accomplish this via program quality. There are two views to retention in higher education: 1) student centered, where the student wants to be successful at the higher educational institution and 2) institution centered, where the institution's goal is to retain the student from beginning to graduation (Scidman, 2005). Thus, gathering information about the students before they graduate is important to understand their views. The reason for the interview is to ascertain students' perceptions of their experience in their chosen major. From the institution's perspective, the interview is important so that the academic unit can improve the curriculum (Ursinus College, 2022).

Exit interviews gather two types of data: 1) quantitative and 2) qualitative. There is no correct formula for collecting data, the key is to use the data for the best intentions for both users, the students and the institutions. As noted in the introduction, the CSS collects quantitative data. The CSS also collects data focused on both the student and institution. The unique aspect of the CSS is also to use a longitudinal methodology and compare the data to other sources (such as the freshman year survey or the Your First College Year survey) and use a base perspective as a freshman entering the institution versus the senior year data collection (Franke *et al.*, 2010). Research conducted in Canada used qualitative data collected from a nursing program. The results indicated 3 factors that influenced student continued participation in the program. They were: 1) institutional factors (student services or curriculum and instruction), 2) social factors (social integration into specific groups, or a need to belong to a community) and 3) cognitive factors (mental health, family/work balance, or language deficiencies) (Manokore, Mah, & Ali, 2019). Finally, Baker, Bettinger, Jacob and Marinescu (2018) noted a link between a program providing labor market outcomes to a student's labor market prospect of acquiring a job in the field.

Exit interviews in hospitality education

In hospitality management education, exit interviews are a means of assessing students. They often undertake these immediately before graduation hoping that the interviewees experience the entire program and will be more candid in expressing their opinions about the program. Typically, having the program chair/director or faculty perform these interviews and offer incentives is important. The objective of these interviews in the hospitality education field is to balance the faculty's view of quality assurance with the students' viewpoint (Kaye, Barrows, & Bosselman, 2013).

At the University of Central Florida (UCF), all undergraduate hospitality management students are required to participate in assessments of their program and curriculum. Dressler, Cedercreutz and Pacheco's (2011) research found the UCF faculty data pertaining to the student's level of competence through the students' performance in school. They found that the students conveyed solid employer satisfaction and greater performance regarding their respect for diversity, ability to work with peers/supervisors, professional attitude, work quality, training with new material and understanding of different work cultures. The researchers also demonstrated a high diversity of performance within all leadership-oriented guidelines. In hospitality, the quantity of highly significant changes in competency can provide a method for faculty to feel positive and confident about the usefulness of their essential curriculum. The assessment method presented allowed faculty to see curricular impacts on student learning and provided an effective model for using gathered information to strengthen curriculum review and progress (Dressler *et al.*, 2011).

In hospitality research from San Francisco State University, researchers used exit interviews to find a difference among first-generation students and traditional students. This study used a quantitative methodology to assess a difference in job placement status between first-generation and traditional students. They concluded the university need to further explore the barriers to first-generation students and apply more career services programming for these students (Schroder, 2019). Another study used a mixed method approach using exit interviews in an internship program. Trinidad (2019) found that students and faculty coordinators believed the implementation of the internship program was highly effective but believed the effectiveness of the implementation of the exit interview process was lacking. The handling of feedback was lacking and ineffectual (Trinidad, 2019).

Accreditation process

Accredited programs must demonstrate that they meet nationally recognized standards of professional knowledge, skills and level of understanding and are relevant to industry needs. An accredited program helps foster nationally recognized industry standards that provide quality assurance for students and gives them confidence in their choice of school and program (Kleinhuis, n.d.). Accreditation has two important purposes: 1) ensuring the quality of programs and 2) improving programs. Accreditation bodies strive to excel programs by developing standards and enhance the understanding of the field (ICHRIE, 2023).

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) is an accreditation agency of higher education academies in the southern states of the US. The SACSCOC board has six primary values: peer review/self-regulation, student learning, permanent quality improvement, integrity, accountability and transparency. This board employs a transparent peer review process that guarantees educational quality and promotes student success (SACSCOC, 2023).

The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) is an international nonprofit organization connecting students, educators and businesses to realize the universal goal of creating great leaders. The AACSB has been associated with the highest standards of excellence because the board offers business education knowledge, quality assurance and learning services (AACSB, 2022).

The Accreditation Commission for Programs in Hospitality Administration (ACPHA) recognizes guidelines necessary for achievable program objectives. These guidelines/standards cover areas such as administration/governance, planning, mission, curriculum, instructional resources, student support services, assurance of student learning, physical and learning assets and financial resources. The ACPHA strives for the quality assessment and development of hospitality programs at various levels (ACPHA, 2022a). There are currently 66 accredited hospitality programs by ACPHA. The benefits of accreditation are: 1) the program has proven its standards of hospitality education, 2) it assures the quality of the institution or the program and 3) it assists with improvements within the hospitality program. To obtain accreditation a program must complete a self-study that contains: 1) mission statement, 2) administration and governance, 3) planning, 4) curriculum, 5) assurance of student learning, 6) instructional resources, 7) student support services, 8) physical and learning resources and 9) financial resources. The HES can assist with the assurance of student learning and any subsequent follow-up to this process (ACPHA, 2022b). In the context of the current project, these agencies are collectively responsible for granting accreditation to a hospitality program at universities in the United States.

Methods

The main goal of this research was to develop a comprehensive senior exit survey specific to a hospitality program. The Delphi method is used to build consensus among experts in the field. Like the nominal group technique, this method allows a small group of experts/professionals in the field to share data/ideas/knowledge anonymously and without peer pressure. In addition, this method allows for a vast pool of experts since geography is not a source of bias. This research used the electronic Delphi method, where questionnaires were delivered electronically through survey software (Qualtrics) (Self, Gordon, & Jolly, 2019). By employing the Delphi method, researchers can effectively harness the collective wisdom and expertise of a diverse panel of experts in the field of hospitality, ensuring a comprehensive survey instrument.

The researchers used a convenience sample to build a Delphi panel. The researchers used their professional networks to ask fellow hospitality educators to participate. The Delphi panel consisted of 22 members, with 11 representatives from the host university and its hospitality program. The host university, located in the southeastern region of the United States, accommodates approximately 225 students. Additionally, the panel comprised 11 experts from various four-year universities across the United States. While many of these experts were also based in the southeastern part of the United States, there were also contributors from the midwestern region. Notably, all the panel members represented hospitality programs of comparable sizes to the host program, ensuring a balanced and relevant perspective. The 22 members had anywhere from 5 to 30-plus years of teaching experience in hospitality, and all reported experience within the hospitality industry. The number of experts required for a Delphi panel is not specified but published studies have reported a range of four to 171 experts (Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007).

The first round of the Delphi panel had the host members submit 5 to 10 of their core courses' test questions to the researchers. The researchers then achieved a consensus that the questions were credible. The second round of the panel had all 22 determine the credibility of each question. The third round of the panel had all 22 participants determine the level of Bloom's Taxonomy. A text information box was placed above each question to help guide each participant with knowledge about Bloom's Taxonomy. The beginning test bank of questions from core courses consisted of 162 potential questions.

Results

As mentioned above, the first aspect of the research was to deem the credibility of the test questions. Delphi members assessed the credibility of each question with a yes or no response. Of the 162 questions, six were deemed not credible by the consensus of the members; thus, these six questions were eliminated. In addition, ten questions came back, with one member of the Delphi panel claiming the question not to be credible, with all the remaining members claiming the question to be credible. Thus, these ten questions were sent to an outside reviewer to deem their credibility. The external reviewer agreed that all ten questions were credible, thus, they were left in the test bank of questions.

The next goal of this research was to verify the level of Bloom's Taxonomy. This was completed by assigning the six levels a numerical digit, one to six. Independent *t*-tests were conducted on the test questions, with group assignments of the host university group of faculty members and the second group of eleven members external to the host university group. The independent *t*-test assessed the difference between the groups. After analysis, three questions were not significant ($p = 0.058$ for all three questions). Again, these three questions were sent to the outside reviewer, who set the level for Bloom's Taxonomy (1956). The ratio of questions in each category was: 1) knowledge = 28%, comprehension = 53%, application = 16%, 4) analysis = 3%, 5) synthesis = 0 and 6) evaluation = 0. Two Delphi panel members noted the absence of the highest levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, which will be discussed in the implication section of this paper. This analysis provided content and construct validity of the survey questions.

Finally, the instrument was assessed by having hospitality students take the survey within two semesters of graduating. Having soon-to-be graduates take the survey will help with the reliability of each question. Over five semesters, students were given a random assignment of 156 questions (162 minus 6). This strategy was used because of the amount of time it would take to complete the 156 questions, plus it helped with a shorter time for completing the survey, hopefully enabling the students to stay focused on the survey questions. The range of responses per question was 73 (Q44403) to 41 (Q15002, Q320015, Q46507). The average number of responses was 57.5 per survey item. Next, the researchers analyzed the reliability results by calculating Cronbach's alpha. The reliability ranged from 0.687 (Q32006) to 0.655 (Q15007). Nunnaly (1978) recommended 0.7 as a satisfactory reliability coefficient, but lower thresholds are sometimes allowed. The students also noted that two questions did not load fully when taking the survey, probably due to the graphics used with the survey items. As a result, the two questions mentioned had low response rates and were deleted from the bank of questions, leaving 154 survey items (N = 154).

Discussion and applications

This research holds significant importance as it focuses on developing the senior Hospitality Exit Survey (HES) and its potential utilization within hospitality programs. The HES serves as a valuable tool for these programs to evaluate the knowledge levels of their graduating students and collect data necessary for assessment and accreditation purposes. This survey is in the development stage. The next step is to implement the survey into the assessment plan of a small sample of universities. Once implemented into a hospitality program, the HES will provide the program with multiple assessment data points that can be analyzed to understand the teaching effectiveness of the program. In addition, accreditation bodies such as the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AASCB) and Accreditation Commission for Programs in Hospitality Administration (ACPHA) can use the HES results to help assess hospitality programs' effectiveness.

As noted in the results section, some Delphi panel members noted the lack of higher-level taxonomies of Bloom (1956). The purpose of this exit survey was to assess the retention of core course material. It was also noted by several faculty members of the host university that they only submitted questions at the first three levels: knowledge, comprehension and application. The exit survey aimed to assess retention of core course material and for knowledge assessment, thus the lower level of Bloom's Taxonomy was justified. Several faculty members stated they strive to build critical thinking skills in projects and exams, thus emphasizing the three highest levels: analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

The host university faculty members determined that a HES would help streamline the assessment reporting process (for university reporting processes) within the program and give assessment data that can be traced back to specific hospitality courses. In addition, obtaining assessment information will allow faculty in the program to adjust course content to improve the retention of material that scored low in the HES. The main purpose of the HES is to provide faculty assessment data on their courses to improve hospitality courses within the program. This translates into more robust and current courses that will enhance the students' ability to be prepared for their careers upon graduation.

Implementing a HES into a hospitality program will also help make the assessment process more efficient. Many programs may analyze the same courses year after year, making minor tweaks to ensure something is being assessed. Having the HES as part of the program could potentially provide an endless amount of assessment data for a program. In addition, once an assessment area is met, it will make it much easier to find the next area of opportunity by reviewing the results of the yearly HES.

Assessment applications

Accreditation is a widely accepted activity in the United States but is seldom used internationally since many countries supervise their educational institutions. With this being the case, the HES can have a theoretical impact by allowing educational institutions to gather student data that can benefit hospitality programs, individual courses and have a lasting impact on any certification program. The focus of developing the HES for hospitality programs was not on specific dimensions of the hospitality industry, and the exam is designed from a holistic approach to cover general hospitality knowledge offered through core hospitality courses within the program. One of the main objectives of developing a HES was to streamline a program's reporting of assessment data. Once the HES has been tested in several universities, many hospitality programs can share and utilize the exam to assist them with their program assessment process.

The HES coincides with the mission of accrediting agencies, these agencies want to have credible hospitality programs, and these organizations want to assist in improving hospitality programs. The positive of this research is developing the bank of potential questions for those graduating from these institutions. With a set of 154 valid and reliable questions, many institutions can decide on the data they would like to collect from their graduating students. This will significantly benefit the hospitality program by aligning it with its unique vision and mission. This should also assist the students by preparing them effectively to enter their hospitality profession.

This project developed and implemented an HES to streamline a program's reporting of assessment data. This will also allow programs to see where knowledge gaps exist with graduating seniors and allow them to adjust course topics to reduce knowledge gaps. Implementing an HES should align with the hospitality programs assessment process and system.

Educational management applications

The goal of any organization is to retain employees. As many human resource managers know, this is not an easy task. However, research has shown high turnover predicts low performance (McEvoy & Cascio, 1987; Kumar, Sunder, & Leone, 2015; Charaba, 2022). Thus, it makes sense to find out why employees are leaving or to study the data collected from exit interviews and use it to benefit the organization. Alternatively, in a positive statement, organizations can use this information to discover why employees stay and then continue to develop goals/strategies to ensure this process stays up to date. Academia is no different. Academia also wants to produce the best product, and since the students are to become the next set of leaders, these programs need to know what is successful and what needs to be adjusted.

Organizations want to hire proficient college graduates. Hospitality organizations can benefit from the HES by knowing they are getting college graduates ready to enter their professional careers/occupations. However, exit interviews can be problematic. First, they can produce data that has no quality, or exit interviews can lack an agreement on best practices. Regardless of the data collection method, the goal is to measure the positive changes these exit interviews create. A strategic exit interview program should:

(1) Uncover issues relating to human resources/students – Many exit interview data often focus on compensation and salaries, but is this the issue? The data can reveal the real story about the policies/procedures of the organization.

(2) Understand employees'/students' perception of the work – Did the exit interview data reveal the actual job analysis details: job description and job specifications?

(3) Managers'/Directors' leadership style and effectiveness – The exit interview data can define the truly effective managers as well as the toxic managers within the organization.

(4) Human resource/college/departments benchmarks – Exit interview data reveal salary and compensation information, but it can also discover information about competitors' benefits, perks and advancement policies.

(5) Improve the organization – Exit interview data can reveal the truth of the organization's policies or strategies. For example, an effective exit interviewer should ask each interviewee to finish this sentence, "I do not know why the organization (school/department) does not do __________"? (Spain & Groysberg, 2016).

The successful implementation of an HES addresses a primary concern for organizations, their human capital. The next step in this research is to test the HES instrument in a small sample of universities to assess the data and then adjust the HES. After that, the goal is for the HES to be used in a wide variety of institutions.

Limitations

This research study has a few limitations that should be taken into consideration. First, the data for this study were collected from a Delphi panel consisting of hospitality faculty members. Therefore, the study's findings might be somewhat limited in representing a broader range of perspectives within hospitality programs. Another limitation stems from the structure of the survey itself. The survey included numerous items requiring two inputs for each item. This format has the potential to introduce certain biases among participants. For instance, participants may tend to choose a neutral response (central tendency) due to the structure of the items. Additionally, factors such as immediacy, rater knowledge about each question, or boredom with the survey's length might influence participants' responses, potentially impacting the validity and reliability of the data collected. Qualtrics, an internet-based survey platform, was employed to address the logistical aspects of the survey administration. While this choice offered convenience and ease of distribution to the participants, it is important to acknowledge that the online format may introduce its own set of limitations. Factors such as varying internet connectivity, technological proficiency of participants and potential distractions in the online environment could potentially impact the participants' engagement and response quality.

The student participants were given a random sample of the items, thus not giving each student identical survey items. As such, the random sampling of survey items provided to student participants also presents a limitation. While this approach aims to ensure diversity and reduce potential bias, it also means that not all students received identical survey items. As a result, there may be variations in the information captured from different subsets of students, which could impact the overall representativeness and generalizability of the findings. Considering these limitations, it is important to interpret the results of this research within the context of these potential biases and constraints. Future studies will further expand the participant pool, could consider alternative survey formats or administration methods and may explore additional perspectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic at hand.

References

Accreditation Commission for Programs in Hospitality Administration ($ACPHA_a$) (2023). Value of accreditation. ACPHA, Available from: https://www.acpha-cahm.org/accreditation/value-of-accreditation/

Accreditation Commission for Programs in Hospitality Administration ($ACPHA_b$) (2023). History. ACPHA, Available from: https://www.acpha-cahm.org/about-us/history/

Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) (2022). *About us*. (n.d.). AACSB, Available from: https://www.aacsb.edu/about-us

Baker, R., Bettinger, E., Jacob, B., & Marinescu, I. (2018). The effect of labor market information on community college students' major choice. *Economics of Education Review*, *65*(August 2018), 18–30. doi: 10.1016/j.econedurev.2018.05.005.

Bloom, B. S., Engelhart, M. D., Furst, E. J., Hill, W. H., & Krathwohl, D. R. (1956). (Ed.), *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals. Handbook 1: Cognitive domain*. New York: David McKay.

Chandler, J. A., Weber, M., Finley, D. A., & Evans, D. (2008). Assessing teaching effectiveness in a basic food laboratory setting: Phase one – Delphi panel study. *Journal of Culinary Science and Technology*, *6*(4), 295–307.

Charaba, C. (2022). Employee retention: The real cost of losing an employee, Available from: https://www.peoplekeep.com/blog/employee-retention-the-real-cost-of-losing-an-employee

Dressler, S., Cedercreutz, K., & Pacheco, A. (2011). Strengthening curriculum through student learning outcome assessment in experiential learning. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Education*, *23*(2), 41–47. doi: 10.1080/10963758.2011.10697005.

Exit interviews: Your ultimate guide (2023). Qualtrics XM, Available from: https://www.qualtrics.com/uk/experience-management/employee/exit-interviews/

Franke, R., Ruiz, S., Sharkness, J., DeAngelo, L., & Pryor, J. (2010). *Findings from the 2009 administration of the college senior survey (CSS): National aggregates*. Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute.

Frase-Blunt, M. (2004). *Making exit interviews work*. SHRM. Available from: https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/pages/0804agenda_empstaffing.aspx

Giacalone, R. A., Jurkiewicz, C. L., & Knouse, S. B. (2003). Exit surveys as assessments of organizational ethicality. *Public Personnel Management*, *32*(3), 397–410.

Gordon, G. E. (1990). Managing for improved employee retention. *Employment Relations Today*, *17*(4), 285–290.

International Council for Hotel (2023). Restaurant, and institutional education (ICHRIE), Available from: https://www.chrie.org/accreditation

Kaye, S. C., Barrows, C. W., & Bosselman, R. H. (2013). *Hospitality management education*. New Yok City, NY: Routledge.

Kleiman, M. (2005). How to retain seasonal workers. *Restaurant Hospitality*, *89*(2), 18.

Kleinhuis, A. (n.d). *Accreditation*. Institute of hospitality, Available from: https://www.instituteofhospitality.org/accreditation/

Kransdorff, A. (1995). Exit interviews as an induction tool. *Management Development Review*, *8*(2), 37–40.

Krathwohl, D. R. (2002). A revision of 'Bloom's Taxonomy: An overview. *Theory of Practice*, *41*(4), 212–218.

Kumar, V., Sunder, S., & Leone, R. (2015). Who's your most valuable salesperson? *Harvard Business Review*, (4), 62–68.

Manokore, V., Mah, J., & Ali, F. (2019). Some factors that impact students' experiences, engagement, and retention in a practical nursing program. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, *65*(2), 129–145.

McEvoy, G., & Cascio, W. (1987). Do good or poor performers leave? A meta-analysis of the relationship between performance and turnover. *The Academy of Management Journal*, *30*(4), 744–762.

Miller, B. (2018). Pros and cons of exit interviews. *HR Daily Advisor; Business Learning Resources (BLR)*, Available from: https://hrdailyadvisor.blr.com/2018/07/02/pros-cons-exit-interviews/

Morrow, J., Jackson, A., Disch, J., & Mood, D. (2011). *Measurement and evaluation in human performance* (4th ed). Champagne, IL: Human Kinetics.

Nunnaly, J. (1978). *Psychometric theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Purdue, J., Woods, R., Elsworth, J., & Ninemeier, J. (2003). The use of employee exit interviews in the private club industry. *Praxis: Journal of Applied Hospitality Management*, *6*(1), 60–71.

Schroder, L. (2019). Job placement rates among first-generation hospitality students. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Education*, *31*(4), 256–260.

Scidman, A. (2005). Minority student retention: Resources for practitioners. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, *2005*(125), 7–24. doi: 10.1002/ir.136.

Self, T., Gordon, S., & Jolly, P. (2019). Talent management: A Delphi study of assessing and developing GenZ hospitality leaders. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *31*(10), 4126–4149, doi: 10.1108/IJCHM-11-2018-0915.

Skulmoski, G., Hartman, F., & Krahn, J. (2007). The Delphi method for graduate research. *Journal of Information Technology Education*, *6*(1), 1–21, 10.1.151.8144.

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) (2023). *About SACSCOC*. SACSCOC, Available from: https://sacscoc.org

Spain, E., & Groysberg, B. (2016). *Making exit interviews count*. Harvard Business Review. Available from: https://hbr.org/2016/04/making-exit-interviews-count

Trinidad, C. (2019). Implementation of the student internship program in the Philippines: The BSc program in Hospitality Management Program of host training establishments in the National Capital Region. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism, and Leisure*, *9*(2), 1–21.

Ursinus College (2022). *Outcomes assessment senior exit interview*. Ursinus College. Available from: https://www.ursinus.edu/offices/academic-affairs/assessment/student-learning-outcomes-assessment-overview/outcomes-assessment-senior-exit-interview/

Westcott, S. (2006). Goodbye and good luck. *Inc.*, *28* (4), 40-42.

Wickham, N. (2021). *Pros and cons of exit interviews and surveys. Quantum Workplace*. Available from: https://www.quantumworkplace.com/future-of-work/pros-and-cons-of-exit-interviews.

Williams, D., Harris, C., & Parker, J. (2008). I love you - goodbye: Exit interviews and turnover in the New Zealand hotel industry. *New Zealand Journal of Employment Relations (Online)*, *33*(3), 70–90.

Corresponding author
Melvin R. Weber can be contacted at: weberm@ecu.edu