

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FOCUSING ON THE COMPETENCIES OF HOTEL MANAGERS IN PRAGUE

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of the study is to determine, assess, and compare three different viewpoints of hotel managers in Prague, educators, and bachelor students from IHM and evaluate their expectations and perceptions concerning crucial competencies necessary for hotel entry-level managerial positions [2]. Surveys were compiled in order to collect data from hotel managers and students. In addition, the survey prepared for students examined their perceptions regarding the contribution of the hospitality management (HM) program at IHM to development of such important competencies. A total of thirty-two hotel managers and twenty-six students participated in this study and revealed their expectations. The results of this study indicated some discrepancies between current expectations of the hotel industry and expectations of educators at IHM. The findings of the study may be possibly valid and applicable to other hospitality management programs [17] in the Czech Republic or further close countries and to other graduate students since expectations of the Czech hotel industry may be comparable to them. A survey research method was used in order to identify the expectations of hotel industry managers and bachelor students. The study besides seeks to find out whether curriculum [11], of IHM hospitality management program is able to meet the current demands of the hospitality industry and its hotel managers in Prague and to satisfy and enhance the prospects of students. Moreover, the study should be of value to all aforementioned stakeholders.

Keywords: competency, competency model, management, hotel management

INTRODUCTION

The identification of necessary managerial competencies needed by hospitality graduates has received increased attention in recent years and has been well documented for example by Tas (1988), Sandwith (1993), Kay and Russette (2000), Nelson and Dopson (2001) [13]. According to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) [26], the travel and tourism industry is exceedingly progressive and is expected to generate \$ 851 billion in revenue with 16.1 million jobs by 2017 [14]. Hence, without a doubt travel and tourism has become a very prospective and attractive sector that lures many students to work and develop their career right in this industry. This fact has created or increased the interest of institutions and universities to develop hospitality management programs [15]. As a result, the number of hospitality management programs has increased significantly over the past 85 years since the first hotel administration program appeared at Cornell University (Guide to College Programs, 2004), [21]. Many

institutions with hospitality programs realize that in order to increase the successfulness and career prospects of their students it is significant to develop curricula that will respond and meet industry's expectations and demands. Gehrels [5] have identified that industry professionals perceive that many hospitality education programs provide students with outdated information with little effort to increase cooperation between them and industry representatives [14]. Therefore, the greater is the necessity to thoroughly analyze the expectations and demands of the hotel industry. There have been numerous studies conducted that sought to determine expectations of hotel managers, educators or students, some of them had even identified expectations of these three different viewpoints simultaneously by Chung- Herrera, Enz and Lankau, 2003 [2]. Certainly, detecting and identifying expectations of hotel representatives create various benefits not just for educators and institutions with hospitality management programs [9], who can adjust curricula accordingly but also for students who can develop or enhance essential competencies necessary for hotel managerial positions based on industry's demands.

METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of the Introduction section was to explain the overall aim of the study research and to give an explanation of the rationale for undertaking this study. The literature review provided appropriate literature background available that supports and clarifies the aims of the research [22]. The methodology chapter explicates what has to be done in order to achieve the aim of the research and provides information on what procedures had to be undertaken to come up with the research results [4]. The Methodology part will also provide an explanation of research aim and clarify the methods for data collection and analysis [12]. The aim of this study is to determine and compare expectations of Prague hotel managers regarding essential competencies necessary for managerial positions, expectations of educators from the Institute of Hospitality Management in Prague (IHM) that are reflected in the hospitality curriculum [11] and expectations of IHM students and their perceptions on how hospitality management program at IHM contribute to the development of such important competencies [6]. This chapter describes how the research was designed and carried out and encompasses the following sub-sections: research instrument, population, sample selection, data collection, and data analysis and response rate. The research approach used in this study is deductive since it tests existing theory and tries to determine research results based on the existing competency model of Chung-Herrera, Enz and Lankau [3] and quantitative since it generates numerical data. Survey research was used as research strategy with 110 surveys successfully sent to hotel managers in Prague, 25 to graduate students at IHM of hospitality management program in English and 35 surveys were sent to IHM graduate students of hospitality management program with instructions in Czech [15]. The reasons why survey research was used as a research strategy are following: enough contacts of the representative sample were obtainable, previous well-elaborated studies were available that used this method and also using of survey method represents benefits in terms of processing statistical data [25]. As a research strategy of this study can be also deemed comparative research strategy

since the study research seeks to discover discrepancies and explain possible differences between expectations of hotel managers, hospitality students and educators from IHM [9].

Research Questions

Research question is an organizing element that narrows topic area and guides every aspect of the research project including the literature research, the design of the study, data collection, data analysis and interpretation of results in Santiago, 2009th. This study addresses and answers following research questions:

What are the expectations of hotel managers in Prague regarding essential competencies necessary for future graduates aspiring for hotel managerial positions?

Are there any gaps and discrepancies between expectations of hotel managers in Prague and expectations of educators at IHM? If yes, which specifically?

How and to what extent does IHM hospitality program in English contribute to development of such important competencies?

Research Objectives

The following research objectives were formulated in order to answer the research questions and thus achieve the aim of this study:

1. Describe demographic profile of hospitality leaders (hotel directors and managers) of four and five star hotels in Prague including: gender, age, level of education, position at the hotel, department of performance, length of hotel experience and classification of the hotel of performance.

2. Determine and assess Prague hotel manager's expectations regarding essential competencies and qualifications that ought to possess future graduates with the intention of becoming successful "entry-level" managers.

3. Analyze curriculum of hospitality program at IHM and determine what is being taught. Determine expectations of educators from IHM who are compiling curriculum.

4. Ascertain whether there are any discrepancies and gaps between current expectations and demands of hotel industry and expectations of IHM.

5. Describe demographic profile of bachelor students in hospitality management program at IHM including: gender, age, academic performance, current employment at the hotel and work experiences in hotel industry.

6. Detect student's point of view and find out which particular competencies do they find most important.

7. Define whether bachelor students of hospitality management program at IHM consider this study program as contributing and assisting in achieving essential competencies currently expected by hotels managers in Prague.

Significance of Study

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The significance of this study is that it will create several benefits and values for different stakeholders of this study (educators, students, and hotels). Principally, findings may generate advantages for students, especially in Prague. By knowing the current expectations of the hotel industry regarding essential competencies for “entry-level” managers, graduates can enhance their preparedness and focus on competencies that they are lacking behind. Graduates become more desirable and sought-after due to possession of exact skills and competencies necessary for today’s successful penetration into the hotel industry [24].

Secondly, educational institutions and universities with hospitality programs may reap the benefits too. Based on the findings educators may adjust and improve curricula according to industry’s expectations and enhance the potential for their students’ success [22]. Readjusted curricula may meet needs of graduates and the demands of markets they are entering [11]. Results show essential competencies necessary for graduates who want to hold managerial positions at the hotel expected by hotel managers. In addition, students reveal how they perceive the hospitality management program at IHM contributes to the development of such significant competencies. Thirdly, hotel managers may benefit as well, by revealing current expectations hotels can anticipate well-prepared graduates which can certainly increase the quality of hotel services.

The survey was sent to managers from different departments: Executive Office, Human Resource and Training, Finance and Accounting, Marketing and Sales, Rooms Division, Revenue Department or Reservation Department [19]. The reasons why solely four and five star hotel managers were chosen as appropriate sample are following:

- Representative number of email addresses was available specifically from managers from luxury and first class hotels,
- For students may be more beneficial and attractive to be aware of expectations of managers who work in four and five star hotel, since their expectations may be higher and it is better to be prepared for the highest criteria,
- Students equipped with necessary competencies expected by luxury and first-class hotels can more easily satisfied needs and demands of hotel recruiters from other lodging facilities (one, two, three star hotels...).
- Secondly, the target population for this study was bachelor students of the Hospitality Management program taught in English and in the Czech language at IHM. The survey prepared for students was sent via email through IS (IHM’s Information system) to all 25 students studying Hospitality Management in English. Another target sample for this study was bachelor students studying hospitality management in Czech, from all 176 (N = 176) students, the survey was sent via email through IS to 35 students selected based on a systematic random strategy where each fifth person was chosen. Due to the sampling technique used, the results should be represented within the population of IHM students. The reasons for distributing a survey to two different groups of students studying the

same program, but instructed in two different languages (English and Czech) are following:

- The results may provide valuable comparison and beneficial feedback to IHM on which program is more successful regarding providing and developing essential competencies to students, which program do students perceive to be more effective and helpful or whether there are some differences in perceptions of Czech and English program students,
- Since the bachelor students attending hospitality management program taught in English study the pilot program, it is essential to determine how their perceptions differ from perceptions of Czech students.

- **Data Collection**

The demographic profile of hotel managers included the following characteristics: gender, age, level of education, type of hotel position, type of hotel department where respondents work, length of working experience at the hotel and classification of the hotel where respondents work [23]. The demographic profile of students included information about gender, age, employment at the hotel and length of working experience in the hotel industry, if any. The demographic profile revealed some useful and interesting findings such as: the most frequent level of education that managers acquired (beneficial for students to know if the hotel industry prefers candidates with bachelor or master degree), compare it to a length of necessary working experience, the average age information and so forth.

The second part of the survey consists of a list of competencies based on the leadership-competency model developed by Chung-Herrera, Enz and Lankau [3], have modified the competency model, based on the feedback from the pilot study, which reflects hospitality-specific behavior [22]. These authors have created final competency model that consists of 8 overarching factors, 29 dimensions and 99 specific behavioral competencies. The competency model used in this study was adjusted and reduced relevantly and just 29 specific behavioral competencies were chosen, each standing for one dimension (see Table 1).

***Table 1** List of Competencies Used in this Study*

Essential competencies:

1. Follow continual learning and self development
2. Be able to adapt to changing circumstances
3. Consider customer needs when making decisions
4. Establish strong relationship with stakeholders
5. Anticipate obstacles and develop contingency plans
6. Monitor progress of others

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7. Perform re-engineering when necessary
8. Encourage others to express their views and opinions
9. Listen carefully to others
10. Take a stand when resolving important issues
11. Select leadership style most appropriate for the situation
12. Promote quality of company's goods and services
13. Address and work through conflicts
14. Write comprehensively and effectively
15. Promote respect among employees
16. Consider a broad range of factors (internal, external and trends) when solving problems and making decisions
17. Give other the authority necessary to accomplish their objectives
18. Act in ethical manner
19. Manage time to ensure productivity
20. Build networks with people inside and outside the hotel
21. Present ideas in convincing manner
22. Take risks when appropriate
23. Examine and monitor trends in the hotel industry
24. Get other interested and involved in the change process
25. Know the strengths and weaknesses of competitors
26. Promote teamwork among groups
27. Support community activities
28. Train others in skill development
29. Recognize and take advantage from strategic opportunities

Source: Adjusted list of competencies based on leadership competency model (Chung-Herrea, Enz and Lankau, 2003).

The "language" of the competency model- its particular names of competencies was also simplified in order to facilitate understanding of competencies for hotel managers who are not native speakers [7]. The tailor-made list of competencies was selected based on own perception of relevance regarding the most essential lodging competencies. The list of competencies was adjusted and shortened in order to develop a survey that is less time-consuming for managers who would be more willing to respond and thus increase the response rate. The hotel managers were asked to rank important competencies and reveal

how essential these competencies are for hotel graduates with the intention of becoming successful hotel “entry-level” managers.

A seven-point Likert-type scale with the following response choices was used in the questionnaire:

- 1 = mostly unimportant,
- 2 = somewhat important,
- 3 = unimportant,
- 4 = neither important nor unimportant,
- 5 = important,
- 6 = somewhat important,
- 7 = mostly important.

A seven-point scale was used instead of a five-point scale because it is more precise and it provides more insights into the perceptions. The second part of the survey prepared for students comprises two questions: first part inquired students to rank 8 competency factors (self-management, strategic positioning, critical thinking, implementation, communication leadership, industry knowledge and interpersonal skills) from Chung-Herrera et al. competency model [3].

Students are supposed to rank these competencies according to seven-point Likert-type scale where:

- 1 = mostly disagree,
- 2 = somewhat disagree,
- 3 = disagree,
- 4 = neither agree nor disagree,
- 5 = agree,
- 6 = somewhat agree,
- 7 = mostly agree.

The graduates ought to evaluate whether the hospitality management program at VSH contributes to the development of these essential competencies. Simply, the questionnaire tried to determine whether they agree or disagree that they have acquired through the hospitality management program these competencies [20]. The second question tried to determine the student’s own opinions. Graduates should again rank 8 aforementioned competency factors according to seven-point Likert-type scale and state how important these essential competencies are for future graduates with the intention of becoming successful hotel “entry-level” managers. The scale in this section was constructed in the following way:

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- 1 = mostly unimportant,
- 2 = somewhat important,
- 3 = unimportant,
- 4 = neither important nor unimportant,
- 5 = important,
- 6 = somewhat important and,
- 7 = mostly important.

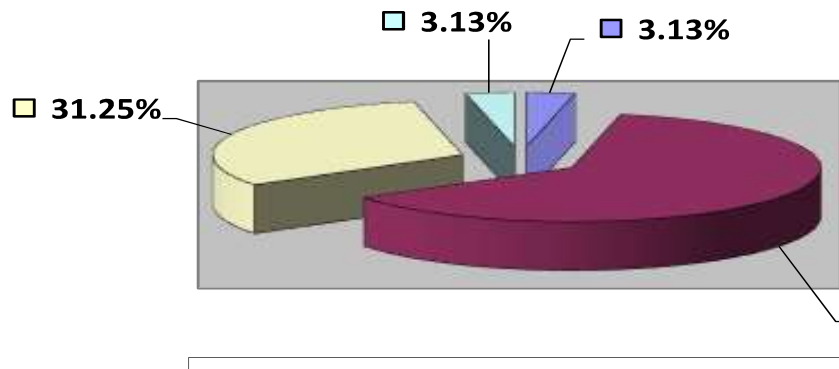
The survey was prepared in English and Czech language and sent via the email. The results may bring interesting findings regarding two possibly different perceptions of Czech and English students.

Table 2: Distribution of Hotel Managers by Sex and Age (N = 32)

<i>Characteristic</i> %	F
<i>Sex Distribution</i>	
Male 53.13	17
Female 46.88	15
<i>Age</i>	
18-24 3.13	1
25-34 62.50	20
35-44 31.25	10
45-54 3.13	1

Source: Author

Chart 1 Age Characteristics of Hotel Managers



Source: Author

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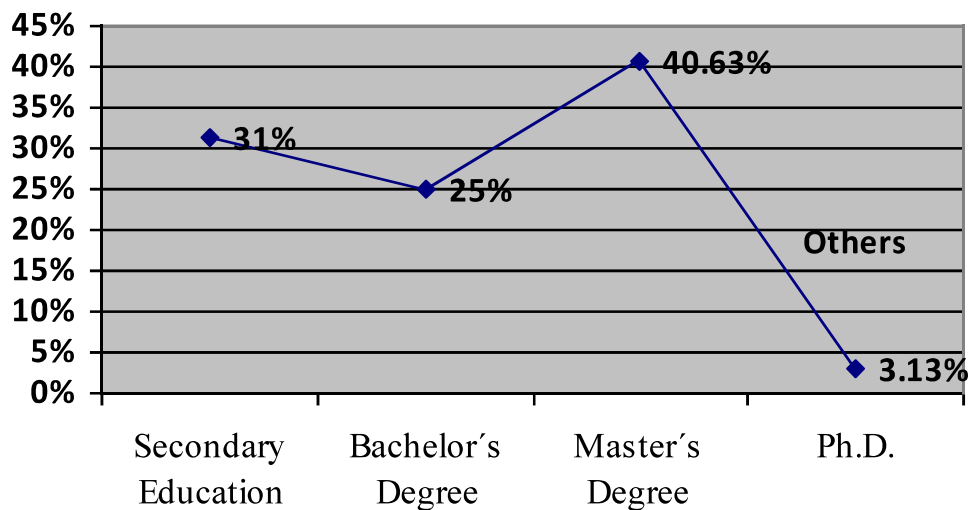
Table 3 *Other Characteristics of Hotel Managers (N = 32)*

Characteristic	F
%	
Level of Education	
Secondary Education 31,25%	10
Bachelor's Degree 25,00%	8
Master's Degree 40,63%	13
Ph.D. 3,13%	1
Hotel Position	
Director 28,13%	9
Manager 68,75%	22
Others 3,13%	1
Department of Performance	
Executive Office 12,50%	4
Human Resource & Training 3,13%	1
Food & Beverage 15,63%	5
Marketing & Sales 28,13%	9
Rooms Division Department 15,63%	5
Revenue Department 3,13%	1
Reservation Department 9,38%	3

Others	4
12,50%	
Length of Working Experience in the Hotel Industry	
Less than 1 year	1
3,13%	
1 to 5 years	4
12,50%	
More than 5 years	27
84,38%	
Classification of the Hotel	
4 star	6
18,75%	
5 star	25
78,13%	
Others	1
3,13%	

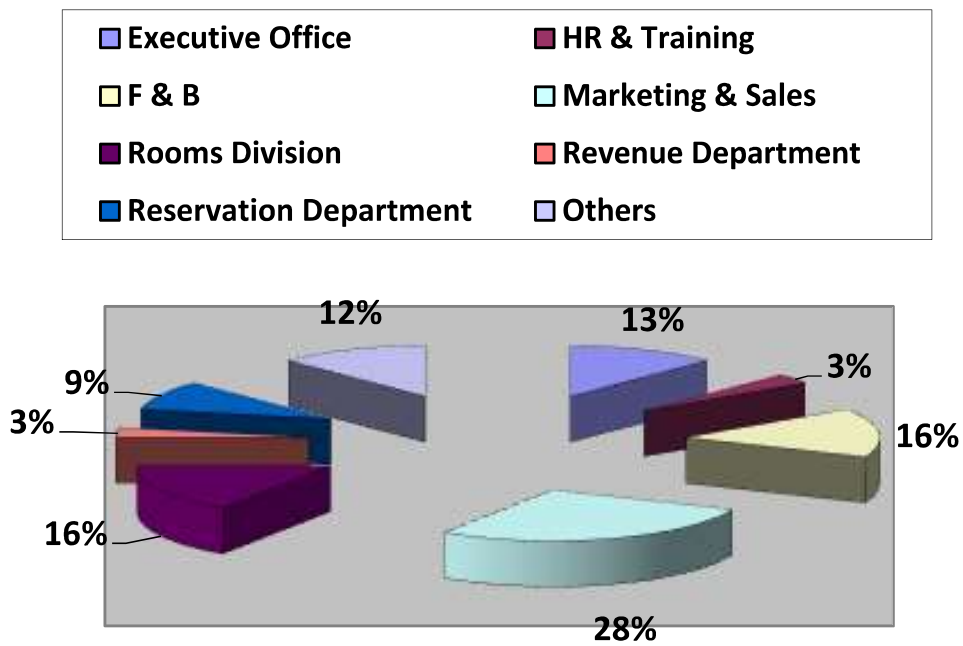
Source: Author

Chart 2 *Level of Education of Hotel Managers*



Source: Author

Chart 3 Hotel Managers by Department



Resource: Author

Table 4 Demographic Profile of English Program Students (N = 16)

Characteristic	F
%	
Sex Distribution	
Male	4
40,00	
Female	6
60,00	
Age	
20 - 25	10
100,00	
Current Employment at the Hotel	
Full-time Employment	1
10,00	
Part-time Employment	3
30,00	

No Employment 60,00	6
Work Experience in Hotel Industry	
Less than 1 year 10,00	1
1 to 5 years 50,00	5
More than 5 years 20,00	2
No Working Experience 20,00	2

Source: Author

THEORY / LITERATURE REVIEW

The main aim of this study was to determine and compare expectations of hotel managers in Prague, educators, and students from IHM regarding to essential competencies necessary for hotel managerial positions [18]. Although there have been already few studies devoted to the revelation of expectations of hotel managers, educators and students just a minimum of studies can be effectively applied within Czech hotel industry. Thus, in order to provide exact data regarding expectations of Czech hotel managers, it was necessary to conduct a tailored study. Several studies have been already investigating and focusing on expectancies from the perspective of all three stakeholders within one study. Enz, Renaghan and Geller as cited [14] have surveyed graduate students, faculty and industry representatives in order to identify essential skills for successful hospitality careers. It was one of few studies that examined expectations regarding hospitality competencies from viewpoint of three different stakeholders simultaneously. Another study, which also served as an inspiration for this thesis, was developed by Cheung, Law and He [2]. The authors have scrutinized the point of view of three different stakeholders: expectations of Hong Kong hotel managers and educators regarding essential competencies and students' assessment of the contribution made by their hospitality management program to the development of such competencies [24]. The number of hospitality education programs has grown significantly over the past 85 years since the first appearance of the first hotel administration program at Cornell University (a guide to College Programs, 2004), [23]. Indeed, over the past 30 years the number of hospitality degree-granting programs has increased from just 41 in 1974 to over 170 in 2004 (Guide to College), as cited [21] "Hospitality schools have not only popped up at universities around the nation, but they have also thrived, as the hospitality industry has evolved into a bigger, more encompassing business, the educational programs at hospitality schools have progressed with it" Len Vermillion, 2010 [9]. On the other hand, such a great increase in hospitality education programs

may cause wide variations among curricula styles and thus results in criticism from industry recruiters who hire graduates from these institutions [9].

CONCLUSION

The research approach used in this study was deductive and quantitative. The population for this study was hotel managers working in four and five-star hotels in Prague (N = 32), students from the English program (N = 16) and students from the Czech program (N = 10). Regarding to sample selection sample subjects were selected based on purposive sampling strategy. The instrument used in this study was the survey (see Appendix A and B), surveys were sent via email to hotel managers and students. First part of the survey consisted of the demographic profile including demographic characteristics such as gender, age, level of education or department of performance for hotel managers and length of working experience in hotel industry or information about current employment at the hotel for students [17]. Second part of the survey consisted of a list of competencies based on the competency model of Chung-Herrera, Enz and Lankau [3]. The list of competencies used in the survey was adjusted in order to comply with hotel managers and students and increase the response rate. There were two different competency models compiled to accomplish aims of this thesis. The list of competencies for hotel managers encompassed 29 competencies and students received a list of competencies consisted just of eight main competency factors [16]. Each survey was sent via email and each question within the survey was marked with answered required symbol in order to eliminate the non-response issue. Regarding to data analysis, results were analyzed partially by the eSurveysPro.com (the Survey Software) that provided frequencies and percentage representation of all data [4]. Moreover, available results were processed by the author and weighted averages were provided as essential statistical means that helped to understand and compare data. The third objective was to describe the demographic profile of bachelor students studying in the English and the Czech HM program at IHM in Prague. The survey revealed that most of the respondents were primarily between 20-25 years, all of them were studying full-time HM program and most of them had already some working experience within the field. Thus, they were considered to be able to provide solid feedback on the survey [12]. The results are shown in tables seven and eight in chapter four. The fourth objective was to define whether students at IHM consider its HM program as assisting in achieving essential competencies expected by the hotel industry in Prague. The results collected through the survey showed that students in general neither agreed nor disagreed that they have acquired through the program such competencies [17]. Students in both programs identified “industry knowledge” as competency most developed by HM program.

DISCUSSION/RECOMENDATION

The findings investigated throughout this study may be of value for hotel managers, students, and schools with Hospitality Management programs in Prague [19]. Educators who are compiling curricula of HM program may consider adjusting and improving them according to current expectations of hotel industry

[10]. Hotel managers have revealed that competencies such as “self-management”, “communication” or “leadership” are appreciated within the industry [18]. However, students at IHM do not perceive that these competencies are developed by their HM program. Educators believe mostly “industry knowledge” or “critical thinking” are essential competencies for graduates since these competencies are mostly incorporated in the IHM curriculum. There can be recognized several discrepancies that should be in the interest of IHM to reduce. In general, educators who communicate and collaborate with industry representatives pursue industry’s demands and expectations to boost the chances and career prospects of their students [15]. This section seeks to investigate possible suggestions that can increase cooperation between hotels and universities with hospitality management programs or propose ideas that can help hospitality education programs improve curriculums and courses that can meet the demands of the hotel industry [8]. Firstly, educators should realize the importance of cooperation between them and hotel representatives. The benefits should be recognized in order to increase the motivation of mutual cooperation which creates remuneration for all people involved. There are several ways how educators and the hotel industry can cooperate [1]. Educators may cooperate with the hotel industry directly through their students and arrange internships for them with hotel managers who will present their expectations during the internship cooperation [20]. Educators should focus on competency-based education (CBE) that is according to Millar, Mao and Moreo [14]: “an institutional process that moves education from focusing on what academics believes graduates need to know (teacher-focused) to what students need to know and be able to do in varying and complex situations (student or workplace focused).”[14].

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