

**WHAT DO CONVENTION MANAGERS REALLY NEED TO KNOW?: A
QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS.**

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ABSTRACT

Currently the convention and meeting sector is one of the fastest growing segments in the hospitality industry [4]. As with most service oriented industries, conventions are dependent upon valuable human resources to provide a competitive advantage and quality service to clients. The aim of this study was threefold: (1) to identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for new entrants into convention industry management positions to be successful in their jobs, (2) to determine the need for convention course curricula in hospitality undergraduate programs, and (3) to establish the most important content of convention course material. Qualitative surveys were distributed to convention service managers and educators and contained questions surrounding the research objectives of interest. Findings are presented, along with recommendations for future research.

Key words: Convention Managers, Convention Education, Qualitative Analysis, Kruskal-Wallis.

INTRODUCTION

In barely over a century the convention industry has grown from a little thought about business in Detroit to an essential participant in the international market. Despite its short history, this sector has experienced extraordinary success; a phenomenon which does not appear to be slowing down. Currently, the convention and meeting industry generates \$122.31 billion in direct spending annually in the United States, making it the 29th largest contributor to gross national product (GNP) [6].

The growing importance placed on this industry has resulted in a subsequent emphasis on human resources. This highly-personal service sector demands qualified employees capable of meeting the needs of convention clients. While hospitality undergraduate programs aim to prepare students for the workforce, few offer convention management training. The implementation of more rigorous and extensive convention courses may alleviate some of the labor shortage the industry currently faces. The purpose of this study is to identify: (1) the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities new convention job entrants must possess, (2) the need for convention course curricula in hospitality undergraduate programs, and (3) the most valuable content of convention course material. By determining the answers to these research objectives, courses may be developed to meet the needs of both students and future employers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Currently the convention and meeting industry supports 1.7 million jobs annually [6]. Industry employment statistics have experienced a consistent upward trend over the past decade which echoes the growth of annual attendance and building of new and larger convention center facilities [7, 8]. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics,

employment opportunities in the convention industry are expected to experience a growth of 18% to 26% between 2004 and 2014 [9]. This anticipated growth is due to increasing globalization, the importance placed on human interaction in a technologically enhanced age, and the value placed on continuing education. Convention industry professionals have stated that there is a labor shortage of well-qualified job applicants for management positions, making it more difficult to ensure quality in a time when quantity is already limited [5]. This shortage is attributed to the aging of current industry professionals [7], the ongoing construction of convention properties which translates into a need for more personnel [5], and a lack of adequate sources from which conventions can draw trained employees [1].

Like most service oriented industries, conventions are dependent upon valuable human resources to provide quality service to clients. The weight placed on personnel selection continues to grow as corporations attempt to gain competitive advantage [3]. This significance placed on hiring and training the right employees demands that employees are prepared for their job duties prior to entering the workforce. Implementing convention focused curricula into hospitality programs may facilitate the learning of the necessary skills and make graduating students more marketable to convention industry employers. Some hospitality programs have already realized this and included convention course offerings to their students. This current research project was designed to determine which learning objectives are vital in undergraduate convention curricula.

METHODOLOGY

This study involved a qualitative survey which was distributed to convention industry professionals and hospitality professors who teach convention courses. Since

there was no solid theory upon which to build this current study grounded theory was determined to be the most appropriate guiding framework. Grounded theory refers to inductively deriving a theory from the study of the phenomenon it represents [2]. The particularly unique quality of grounded theory is that data is collected, analyzed, and theory is formulated mutually.

RESULTS

Necessary Convention & Meeting Management Qualifications

Both current convention industry professionals and faculty were asked about the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics new managers must possess in order to be successful in their jobs. A wide variety of comments were received; however, there was a significant overlap of answers mentioned by both samples. The most frequently articulated qualities included: strong verbal and written communication skills, attention to detail, thorough knowledge of the business, organization, and outgoing personality.

Table 1

Kruskall-Wallis Analysis of Ranks Test Results

	χ^2	df	α
Across Categories	3.8	3	0.284
Planning Skills	7.808	5	0.167
Professionalism	2.4	1	0.121
Industry Knowledge	2.7	2	0.259
Personality Traits	3.857	2	0.145
Personal Qualities	2.133	2	0.344

Kruskall-Wallis analyses of rank tests were used to analyze the relationships between the five classifications of data points. Additionally, individual Kruskall-Wallis tests were used within each category to determine whether any significant difference existed. No significant difference was found at the 0.05 level, which implies that all data points were

justifiably important traits for convention managers to possess. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis analysis are found above in Table 1.

Despite the lack of significant difference from the Kruskal-Wallis tests, a number of valuable comments regarding the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics convention and meeting managers must possess in order to be successful were obtained.

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