

TOURISM EDUCATION FROM A RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE

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This paper adopts a relationship management perspective to examine tourism education in a Caribbean country. It aims to examine the extent to which relationship management can be infused into tourism education. A questionnaire was administered to the employers in hotels, restaurants, and travel agencies on the island to get an idea of the skills they require and their expectations of students' competence upon graduation. Interviews were conducted with other stakeholders in the industry and with education providers to get their views on the level of collaboration that exists between the industry and the educational institution. The results indicated that the employers required a number of industry-specific skills, as well as other employability skills. The employers expressed concerns that students are not adequately prepared for the workplace upon graduation, and that there is a need for collaboration between the industry and the institution to enhance the quality of graduates. The stakeholders suggested that the institution needs to understand the dynamic nature of the industry and to develop a relevant curriculum to cater for their needs. They also suggested that the institution should liaise with the stakeholders to get a greater understanding of the industry's needs so that the curriculum developed would be relevant.

Introduction

Tourism is considered to be one of the largest industries in the world (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2003). In a number of Caribbean islands, the tourism industry is the main industry and sustainable tourism is necessary to maintain the competitive advantage. As a consequence, these islands have developed signature products to attract tourists to their shores, for example, wedding and honeymoon destinations. The quality of the human resources in the tourism sector will impact on the competitive advantage of the islands. Therefore, tourism education plays a vital role in the development of personnel with the employable and employability skills needed to ensure that the Caribbean remains a viable option for visitors.

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Purpose of the Paper

This paper aims to explore the nature of tourism education in a Caribbean island from a relationship management standpoint. It examines how employers and stakeholders in the tourism industry manage their relationships with the educational institution on the island. This investigation is relevant and timely because tourism and hospitality education providers in small island states of the Eastern Caribbean need to establish symbiotic relationships with all their stakeholders, so that there is congruence between the curriculum delivered by the institution and the needs expressed by the stakeholders. Relationship management is used as a springboard in this paper for a discussion concerning the future of hospitality education. The argument advanced is that hospitality education has not fully embraced the changes in the industry in order to establish and maintain nurturing relationships with the major stakeholders in the industry. It is hypothesized that relationship management can enhance the quality of instruction and result in graduates who are trained to meet the needs of the hospitality industry. The key issues investigated are:

1. *What are the relationship antecedents necessary to develop and maintain a relationship among the stakeholders?*
2. *What is the nature of the relationship between the industry and the education provider?*
3. *What strategies can be used to develop and maintain effective relationships between the industry and the educational institution?*
4. *What is the impact of the relationships on the development of industry-specific skills?*

History of Tourism Education

Tourism education emerged from vocational education in Europe, where students were trained in critical areas of hospitality and business (Morgan, 2004). As the tourism industry evolved, tourism educators started to redefine tourism education to include the skills necessary for employability in the industry (Inui, Wheeler, & Lankford, 2006; Tribe, 2001, 2002). The emphasis placed on vocational education was seen as redundant, and the debate on the relevant pedagogy for tourism education examined the design of the tourism curriculum (Airey, 2005; Croy & Hall, 2003; Morgan, 2004; Tribe, 2001). Tribe (2002) argued that tourism education should be flexible enough to enable a “balance between satisfying the demands of business and those of the wider

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tourism society and world” (p. 340). The shift to a more fluid pedagogy would include “some non-vocational aspects” (Tribe, 2001, p. 447).

Tourism Education in the Caribbean

The overall growth of tourism and hospitality education in the Caribbean started with a modest beginning in the 1970s. This was followed by accelerated growth in the 1980s and 1990s. While the growth in education for the tourism sector is worth noting, there is growing concern that there is incongruence between the needs of the tourism industry and the training of personnel to meet its diverse and dynamic needs (Airey, 2005; Amoah & Baum, 1997; Baum, 1993; Conlin & Titcombe, 1995; Critchlow-Earle, 2000; Koh, 1995; Mayaka & King, 2002). It has been argued that the graduates do not possess the skills and attitudes needed to meet the requirements of the industry (Airey, 2005; Conlin & Titcombe, 1995). Other complaints echoed are that the courses lack vocational relevance and practical operational inputs to cater for the changes in the workforce. After graduation, students are still required to pursue additional training in order to perform effectively in the workplace.

The perceived dichotomy between graduate students’ skills and the needs of the labour market has been the concern of stakeholders in many Caribbean countries. Tourism officials have lamented the disjointed and inadequate curriculum, and the inadequate collaboration between the workforce and the training providers (Charles, 1997; Conlin & Titcombe, 1995; Critchlow-Earle, 2000; Lewis, 2006). Conlin and Titcombe (1995) have argued that tourism education in the Caribbean, which they described as “fragmented, uncoordinated and usually redundant” (p. 67), has suffered serious problems. They were concerned that the problems experienced in tourism education would hinder the growth of the industry. Luke and Ingold (1990) insisted that the needs of the industry must be considered in all stages of the curriculum planning process; otherwise, the curriculum would lack purpose and credibility.

Charles (1997) reviewed the state of tourism and hospitality education and training in the Caribbean. He posited that tourism and hospitality education is vital for the economic viability of Caribbean tourism. He further contended that there is a need to adopt a strategic approach to tourism education and training on the part of both educators and policymakers. He also suggested that the proper selection of people for the industry, through quality educational and training opportunities, would give the Caribbean a competitive advantage in world tourism.

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Critchlow-Earle (2000) also suggested that training institutions in the Caribbean need to focus on developing market-driven standards for tourism and travel. She further explained that tourism education must be highly individualized, and that the role of the instructor should change to that of manager and resource person. This would result in students assuming a greater responsibility for their own learning. She also identified the need for appropriately educated, trained, and experienced faculty to help facilitate the changes in tourism education.

A critical analysis of the role of The University of the West Indies (UWI) in tourism education focused on issues faced by educators (Hall & Jayawardena, 2002). The results suggested that there is need for a collaborative approach to ensure the sustainability of the industry. McLeod (2002) highlighted the need for well-trained human resources to ensure sustainable development of the industry, and examined *getting the industry into education and getting education into the industry* as a strategy to enhance the quality of graduates who enter the industry. She suggested that this strategy could initiate some level of collaboration among all stakeholders in the industry.

More recently, Lewis (2005) examined the relevance of stakeholder theory in planning and developing a hospitality curriculum for the Caribbean. She concluded that stakeholder involvement in curriculum planning and development is pivotal because it has implications for holistic tourism education. She suggested that curriculum planning and implementation in hospitality and tourism needs to take into account the stakeholders' view, in order to improve the quality of instruction and ensure relevance.

The demand for skilled workers in the tourism industry in the Caribbean will continue to be high. Although there is still great dissatisfaction about the quality of graduates with respect to their professionalism, greater collaboration among the stakeholders would help to enhance the quality of instruction. To be viable in the 21st century, all the institutions must build and nurture relationships with the employers in the tourism industry. The tourism educators need to take the lead in the discussion with the stakeholders, which will determine their position in the rapidly changing environment. They need to develop a curriculum that reflects the changes in the global tourism environment. Cognizance must be taken of the fact that the tourism industry is dynamic. To thrive in this ever-changing industry, the personnel must see their professional development as continuous, rather than as being something that they engage in every now and then, and through short, unstructured courses.

Theoretical Perspective: Relationship Management

This paper examines tourism education in a Caribbean country from a relationship management perspective. The concept of relationship management is not new; it is used widely in business and public relations. From a business perspective, it has taken many forms to address specific organizational dynamics. While the concept of relationship management centres on areas in business and public relations, there is some discourse on the application of relationship management in education (Grönroos, 1994; Gummesson, 2002; Jain, Jain, & Khar, 2003). Relationship management in workforce education is based on the premise that education and industry can develop relationships that are manageable and nurturing (Grönroos, 1994; Gummesson, 2002).

Education – Workforce Relationship Management: A Conceptualization

Relationship management has become increasingly important in the corporate world (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997; Huang, 2001). Although relationship management is used in many business sectors, there is concern that the construct of *relationship* is not clearly defined (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997, 2000).

Broom et al. (1997) examined one of the major obstacles to the development of the relationship management perspective: the absence of a common definition for the term *relationship*. They reviewed relationship theory in the fields of public relations, interpersonal relations, family relations, group dynamics, organizational relations, psychotherapy, and international relations. Their findings suggested that what was conceptualized as a relationship by diverse fields was not commonly operationalized. In their opinion, the lack of a common definition would impede the study of relationship management from an academic standpoint because it would be difficult to measure. One can also argue that relationship management may be a complicated concept because it means different things in different contexts. Broom et al. (1997) made the following observations:

For a relationship to develop:

- the parties involved must have perceptions and expectations of each other;
- one, or each, party needs resources from the other;
- one or both parties perceive mutual threats from an uncertain environment; and

- there is either a legal or voluntary necessity to associate. (p. 95)

They further indicated that “relationships are the dynamic results of the exchanges and reciprocity that manifest themselves as the relationships develop and evolve, but they can be described at a given point in time” (p. 95). From their perspective, they have not given a concrete definition of relationship but have explained conditions under which relationships can develop. They subsequently proposed a three-stage model that could be used by researchers who wish to explore a relationship perspective. They acknowledged the need to look at relationship theory by the examination of the following elements: antecedents of relationships, the relationship state, and the consequences of relationships.

Antecedents of relationships would comprise the opinions, intentions, needs, and contribution of the individuals within the relationship. Although Broom et al. (1997) did not expand on *state of the relationship*, it can be construed as the nature of the relationship between the parties involved. The *consequences of the relationship* would include the results of the interaction, which would impact on the environment within which the organization operates.

Grunig and Huang (2000) also proposed a three-stage model of organization-public relationships similar to the model proposed by Broom et al. (1997). They also identified three elements in their model: situational antecedents, maintenance strategies, and relationship outcomes. They described the *situational antecedents* as the nature of the interactions and the environmental conditions that bring parties together to form a relationship. *Maintenance strategies* include the measures put in place by the parties to initiate and cultivate their relationships. They looked at the strategies as either stable or unstable interactions. *Stable interactions* would benefit both parties in the relationship and include mutual respect, open communication, networking, integrative negotiation, collaboration, and sharing of tasks. *Unstable interactions* would focus on one party’s interest over the other, and include distributive negotiation, avoiding, competing, and accommodating. *Relationship outcomes* include goal attainment and perceptions of the relationship state.

In essence, a relationship develops when a number of conditions are met. These conditions are described by Broom et al. (1997) as “sources of changing pressures or tensions on the system derived from the environment (p. 94). These changing pressures would involve the transactions between the parties. The transactions would involve the

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sharing of resources between the tourism sector and the education provider. It would be evident in the nature of the “interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organisation and its public” (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 2000, p. 18). We can therefore conclude that in relationships, there are mutual exchanges between the parties to ensure that everyone benefits from the transactions or exchanges (Grönroos, 1994).

Stakeholders are of the view that the relationship between education and industry needs strengthening in order to ensure that they share a common vision (Busby, 2005), focus, and commitment (Cooper & Westlake, 1998). The relationship that exists between the stakeholders and the hospitality education providers seems to focus primarily on work experience or industry placement (Theuns & Go, 1992). This represents the conventional way of looking at the relationship between the two entities (King, 1991). The work experience is seen as a prerequisite for graduation. The conventional form is one where the educational institution initiates the placement of students in various hospitality workplaces for a fixed period. Students are then placed in various departments by the human resource personnel. The students are usually supervised by the head of the department, with regular visits by the educators, who would do their final assessment based on the feedback received from the workplace personnel.

The conventional model of industry and education relationship is functional, because the industry receives cheap labour and the institution gets some structured training for the students. In that case, it can be viewed as a win-win situation. This paper argues that although the arrangement seems functional, it is static; because in a dynamic tourism industry such a practice does not display strategic planning, and the interests of all the players in the industry are not fully reconciled. It is necessary to reconstruct the relationship between the key stakeholders in the tourism industry and the education provider. Focus must be placed on the elements that address the needs of a labour-intensive industry adequately. The paper argues that relationships between the hospitality industry and education providers should be expressed by the interactions between the stakeholders and the educational institution, and characterized by mutual understanding and respect that benefits the sector and the training provider.

The argument articulated here is that it is necessary to examine the nature of the relationship between the industry and education providers from a *systems theory* and *resource dependent perspective*.

Systems Theory

Systems theory addresses the way information is communicated between entities. A system is described as a set of interdependent units that work together to adapt to a changing environment (Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 1993, p. 81). Systems are classified as either open or closed systems. An open system is characterized by a mutual exchange with other subsystems in the environment, through a permeable or semi-permeable boundary. In a closed system the boundary between the subsystems is impermeable and there is no exchange of resources (Infante et al., 1993). For the purpose of this paper, an open system can be construed as stable and results in a “win-win” situation. A closed system can be construed as unstable and benefits one entity over the other. The theory identifies the relationship among organizations as systems made up of members and associations. Communication is established in patterns called networks (Infante et al. 1997).

If one looks at the relationship between the industry and the education provider from the systems theory perspective, the interdependence of the two entities can be examined. The interdependence would be manifested in the following ways:

- the extent to which resources within the system are used and shared
- the availability or scarcity of critical resources
- the communication among units in the system

These elements determine the relationships among social actors—specifically, the degree of conflict and interdependence present in the social system. Conflict and interdependence, in turn, determine the uncertainty the organization confronts (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 68).

For survival, the stakeholders and the education provider must interact as interdependent units through activities that could benefit both parties. As a permeable system, they can build a sound relationship and minimize incongruence between the industry and education provider. In order to ensure that the education provider meets the needs of the industry, it is necessary to understand the importance of building relationships among the units in the system and dealing with the changing pressures within the industry.

Resource Dependent Perspective

Sources of changing pressures on the system are perceived as the dynamic industry that needs competent workers to ensure that the Caribbean has a competitive advantage in tourism and hospitality. The antecedents of the relationship in this system can be explained from resource dependence theory (Broom et al., 1997).

From a resource dependent perspective, it can be argued that the tourism sector needs resources to maintain the competitive advantage of the industry. In this sector, the resource is human capital; the need for competent human resources. Therefore, the relationship would involve the exchange of resources between the education provider and the tourism sector. This, Broom et al. (1997) recognized as the “mutual benefit that comes from the voluntary transaction and mutuality of interests and rewards” (p. 91).

Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) suggested that the level of resource dependency among units is determined by three factors. First, the overall importance of the resource to the organization is significant in determining the resource dependence of organizations. Second, the shortage of the resource is also a factor. If the demand for the resource exceeds the supply, then the organization becomes more dependent. Finally, we must examine the other organizations competing for control of the resources. Together, the three factors determine the level of dependence that an organization has upon a particular resource.

The resource dependency is followed by an exchange of resources or a transaction between the entities. In a transaction, each party networks for the purpose of receiving the resource. There is an effort to develop the relationship, because the benefits are either realized immediately or there is an expectation that the other party will reciprocate at a later date.

Relationships are essential for the success of the industry partners. A relationship exists between the tourism sector and the education providers when there is an open or stable system which identifies the resources that are necessary for the development. Through mutual exchange, they will develop a curriculum that meets the needs of the industry.

One of the challenges of the tourism industry is to integrate the needs of the employer and the training of personnel to cater for that need. It is necessary to devise a good fit between the expressed needs of the tourism sector and the curriculum developed by the education providers. Relationship management will seek to harmonize and synergize the relationship between the two sectors in order to realize targeted benefits for the system.

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The relationship management approach, if applied effectively, can be useful in understanding how education and industry could develop and maintain relationships for greater efficiency (Jain et al., 2003). It is important for education providers to enhance their links with the stakeholders in order to develop a symbiotic relationship, which would enhance the quality of instruction and, as a result, the quality of the graduates (Gummesson, 2002).

Methodology

A summative decision-oriented evaluation approach was employed for this investigation. In this approach, the evaluation determines the nature of the decisions to be made, such as selecting, collecting, and analysing the information needed in making these decisions, and reporting this information to the appropriate authorities (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). Evaluation research is conceptualized as “the determination of the worth of an educational programme, product, procedure or objective or, of the potential utility of alternative approaches to attain specific goals” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 542). In this paper, the relationship between the stakeholders and the educational institution is evaluated.

Population and Sample

The relationship management evaluation was conducted in a Caribbean country in order to get the views of the tourism sector and the education provider on the nature of the relationship in the system. Central to this study is the diversity of the units in the system, especially in the tourism sector. The units in the system included the tourism sector, which was comprised of accommodation, food and beverage, travel and attractions, and tourism services. The education sector was comprised of the administrators, curriculum developers, and lecturers. The aim of the selection was to get the perception of the different units, in order to obtain a holistic view of the nature of the relationship between the industry and the education provider.

A stratified random sampling procedure was utilized in the research. The sample comprised of 48 individuals from the tourism sector and five individuals from the educational institution.

Data Source or Evidence

A literature review (American Society for Training and Development [ASTD], 1990; Nibbs & Morgan, 1999; United States. Department of Labor. Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills

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[SCANS], 1991) and data from previous interviews with three employers in the tourism industry formed the basis of the needs questionnaire. The Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) classified the skills needs into four recognized levels of placement in the industry (Nibbs & Morgan, 1999). The categories were classified as follows: operational or front-line employees, supervisory personnel, management, and senior executives. This paper focuses on operational/front-line skills. The skills identified by the CTO are:

1. Operational skills such as ticketing, bartending.
2. Demonstration of a service attitude, which they describe as the ability to anticipate and respond to customers' needs.
3. Product knowledge, where workers need to have a working knowledge of, and interest in, their community in terms of its history, geography, and attractions as well as the availability of complementary services.
4. Corporate policies and procedures. They believe that the employees need to know their employers' expectations, and be familiar with the company's goals, objectives, and operational policies.
5. Selling and interpersonal skills. This includes self-presentation skills, the ability to sell the product and to be able to deal sensitively and effectively with multicultural issues, international clientele, and international business etiquette.

In the United States, two national studies—one by the American Society for Training and Development (1990); and the other by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (1991)—were instrumental in the identification of employability skills. They are often used as yardsticks or beginning points for other agencies. ASTD highlighted six skills groups across all job families:

1. Basic competency skills – reading, writing, computation
2. Communication skills – speaking, listening
3. Adaptability skills – problem solving, thinking creatively
4. Developmental skills – self-esteem, motivation and goal-setting, career planning
5. Group effectiveness skills – interpersonal skills, teamwork, negotiation
6. Influencing skills – understanding organizational culture, sharing leadership

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The SCANS report (1991) identified and discussed the dynamism of the workplace over the century. The aim of the report was to help educators to understand that curriculum and instruction are dynamic, and that they need to ensure that they are relevant in the changing workplace. The report referred to the days when “a strong back, a willingness to work, and a high school diploma were all that was needed to make a start” (p. 1). This was contrasted with the new “high performance workplace.” They argued that:

in this new environment, work is problem oriented, flexible and organised in teams, labour is not a cost but an investment. Most important, the high-performance organisation recognises that producing a defective product costs more than producing a high quality one. The solution: design quality into the product development itself, particularly by enabling workers to make on-the-spot decisions. (pp. 3–4)

The SCANS report (1991) identified three fundamental skills and five workplace competencies that workers must have in order to succeed in the dynamic workforce. The three fundamental skills are: basic skills (literacy, numeracy, communication); thinking skills (decision making, problem solving); and personal qualities (responsibility, integrity, self-esteem, self-regulation). The five competencies are classified as follows: resources (identifies, organizes, plans, and allocates resources); interpersonal (works with others); information (acquires and evaluates information); systems (understands complex interrelationships); and technology (works with a variety of technologies).

Instruments and Instrumentation

Firstly, data were collected from interviews with a random sample of seven human resource managers in the tourism sector. From the interview data, a questionnaire was generated and sent to 12 employers from the accommodation sector, 12 from food and beverage, 12 from travel and attractions, and 12 from tourism services. The education providers were required to give an overview of the training provided and the status of the relationship between the stakeholders and the training provider.

The interviews, which were conducted with the human resource managers in the industry, yielded the relationship antecedents, that is, the skills and attitudes that they felt their employees need to possess in order to perform their duties successfully in the industry. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section A was a needs survey. A Likert-type

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questionnaire was administered, which required employers to score the skills that they would like their employees to possess on a scale from 1 to 3, where 1 = *not important*; 2 = *important*; and 3 = *very important*. Twenty-six skills were presented. Section B consisted of open-ended questions, which asked for the employers' perceptions of the educational institution and the relationship that exists between the industry and the institution. The questions were designed to determine: (a) the status of the relationship between the education provider and the tourism sector, and (b) how collaboration could be enhanced to ensure that the institution produces competent students for the industry.

An official from the Ministry of Education was interviewed to determine (a) the status of the relationship and (b) how the Ministry and the institution could foster relationships to help enhance the programme to cater for the students' and the industry's needs.

A semi-structured interview was conducted with the head of the educational institution and three lecturers to get an overview of the nature of the relationship between the institution and the tourism sector.

Results

The data were analysed by examining four elements of relationships: relationship antecedents, relationship state, relationship development and management, and relationship outcomes (Broom et al. 1997; Grunig & Huang, 2000).

Relationship Antecedents

Relationship antecedents are described as the needs that are expressed by the units in the system (Broom et al., 1997). The units are seen as the tourism sector and the education sector. The questionnaire was analysed from the tourism sector perspective. Principal component factor analysis with Varimax rotation resulted in five factor solutions with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. The factor solution accounted for 60% of the total variance. The component reliability for all factors ranged from .431 to .796. Five distinct factors emerged, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Factor Loadings for Important Tourism and Hospitality Skills

Skills	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
Tourism- Specific Skills					
Ability to deal with guests' complaints effectively	.758				
Knowledge of company's goals and operational procedures	.739				
Ability to deal with international clientele	.666				
Knowledge of the island in terms of history, attractions, geography, and complementary services.	.518				
Ability to sell the tourism product and facility	.517				
Knowledge of the tourism industry	.477				
Interpersonal Skills					
Willingness to work as a team member		.764			
Ability to make guests feel welcome		.738			
Ability to deal sensitively and affectively with multicultural issues		.719			
Knowledge of international business etiquette		.670			
Basic Skills					
Ability to speak fluently and confidently			.738		
Computer literacy			.723		
Foreign language skills			.593		
Good academic qualifications			.477		
Qualifications in vocational education			.435		
Thinking Skills					
Willingness to learn new skills				.796	
Critical thinking				.781	
Problem solving skills				.612	
Creativity				.577	

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Skills	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
Personal Qualities					
Friendly					.717
Reliable and trustworthy					.630
Cheerful, polite, and helpful at all times					.613
Clean and tidy appearance					.516
Positive attitude					.476
Willingness to take responsibility					.431

The factors were classified as tourism-specific skills, interpersonal skills, basic skills, thinking skills, and personal qualities. The ratings for the 26-item skills and attitudes were analysed by computing the mean and standard deviation for each item. The results suggest that all of the employers in the industry identified operational skills—ability to deal with guests’ complaints effectively; ability to make guests feel welcome; reliable and trustworthy; and cheerful, polite, and helpful at all times—as very important skills needed for the industry. The results obtained were arranged to compare the means and standard deviations of the different sectors of the industry (see Table 2).

Looking at the data from a resource dependent perspective, tourism-specific skills constituted the most highly rated skillset needed by tourism sector employers. This was followed by personal qualities. The basic skills component was the least popular choice among the employers. An examination of the most highly rated skills by the employers shows that tourism-specific skills and personal qualities are necessary skills to maintain the competitive advantage. The education sector then needs to understand the relationship antecedents in order to provide the relevant training. The status of the relationship between the two entities will determine the nature of the exchange.

Table 2. Important Skills and Attitudes Required in Tourism Sector Employment

Statement	Accommodation		Food and Beverage		Travel and Attractions		Tourism Services	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Tourism-Specific Skills								
Operational skills	3	0	3	0	3	0	3	0
Ability to deal with guests' complaints effectively	3	0	3	0	3	0	3	0
Knowledge of company's goals and operational procedures	3	0	2.9	0.3	2.9	0.3	2.8	0.4
Ability to deal with international clientele	3		3	0	2.8	0.4	3	0
Knowledge of the island in terms of history, attractions, geography, and complementary services	2.9	0.3	2.8	0.4	2.8	0.4	2.8	0.4
Ability to sell the tourism product and facility	2.8	0.4	3	0	3	0	3	0
Knowledge of the tourism industry	2.4	0.5	3	0	2.8	0.4	3	0
Interpersonal Skills	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Willingness to work as a team member	3	0	3	0	2.9	0.3	2.8	0.4
Ability to make guests feel welcome	3	0	3	0	3	0	3	0
Ability to deal sensitively and effectively with multicultural issues	2.2	0.2	2.5	0.5	2.5	0.5	2.5	0.5
Knowledge of international business etiquette	2	0	2	0	2.1	0.3	2.4	0.5

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Statement	Accommodation		Food and Beverage		Travel and Attractions		Tourism Services	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Basic Skills								
Ability to speak fluently and confidently	2.8	0.4	2.9	0.3	2.8	0.4	2.8	0.4
Computer literacy	2.3	0.4	2.4	0.5	2.1	0.7	2.5	0.4
Foreign language skills	1.8	0.7	2	0.7	2.1	0.7	1.8	0.7
Good academic qualifications	1.8	0.4	2.2	0.4	2.3	0.5	1.8	0.7
Qualifications in vocational education	1.8	0.4	2	0.5	2	0.6	2	0.5
Thinking Skills								
Willingness to learn new skills	3	0	2.8	0.4	2.75	0.5	3	0
Critical thinking	2.5	0.5	2.6	0.5	2.3	0.8	2.8	0.4
Problem-solving skills	2.5	0.5	2.6	0.5	2.7	0.5	2.8	0.4
Creativity	2.2	0.4	2.2	0.4	2.3	0.5	2.1	0.7
Personal Qualities								
Friendly	3	0	2.7	0.5	2.9	0.3	3	0
Reliable and trustworthy	3	0	3	0	3	0	3	0
Cheerful, polite, and helpful at all times	3	0	3	0	3	0	3	0
Clean and tidy appearance	3	0	3	0	2.9	0.3	3	0
Positive attitude	2.9	0.3	3	0	3	0	2.9	0.3
Willingness to take responsibility	2.8	0.4	2.6	0.5	2.7	0.5	2.8	0.4

Relationship State

The status of the relationship influences the conversation that would take place between the sectors. The employers and the educators were required to give their views on the nature of the relationship between the two sectors. The question asked was: “What is the nature of the relationship between the tourism sector and the training institution?” Of the 48 respondents from the tourism sector, 36 (75%) were very concerned about the level of collaboration between the units; 10 (21%) were concerned about the limited dialogue between the units; and the remaining 2 (4%) expressed some level of satisfaction with the relationship state. The educators indicated that the employers were involved to a limited extent in terms of the internship component of the programme. Two major themes emerged from the data: (a) involvement in the curriculum design, and (b) consultation in the development of the internship component of the course.

Curriculum design. The employers stated that they had limited or no knowledge of what was happening at the institution. They expressed the desire to collaborate with the institution to develop an industry-relevant curriculum. One employer in travel and attractions responded that she was unable to answer the question on the nature of the relationship because she did not know what was happening at the institution. However, she indicated the need to become involved:

“Unfortunately, I cannot answer this question because I have no idea what is happening at the college. However, I would like to know and make a positive contribution to the department; at this establishment we do not know exactly what is happening and right now we are very keen as to what is taking place at the department.”

The internship component. The internship component of the programme was seen as important by all employers and educators. However, the employers were concerned about the level of collaboration between the units. One employer in food and beverage highlighted the importance of the internship to students:

“The internship component of the programme is important. Students get experience in the field and they are also able to identify an aspect of the industry that they feel most comfortable. They are also able to recognize areas that they would like to specialize in. That being said, I think that there needs more

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consultation between the industry and the institution to ensure that students get a holistic experience in the industry.”

The views were also echoed by another employer in accommodation:

“The internship programme was a good idea. Yet, there is a need for more collaboration between the department and the industry to make it more meaningful.”

The education providers acknowledged that the major contact is the placement of students in the industry, and that they are making strides to establish a more meaningful relationship. One lecturer stated:

“Our relationship is an historic one. We send our students to the different institutions to get industry experience. The tourism sector welcomes the students and they provide them with the practical skills needed to do well in the industry. We at the school think we need to go beyond that and establish more meaningful relationships with the sector.”

The findings suggest that a relationship exists between the two units. This relationship hinges on the internship programme. The internship is a traditional approach to the relationship. It has served the basic function of giving students industry experience. Although this initiative has worked satisfactorily in the past, the two units need to move beyond the basic relationship to a more supportive relationship. The findings also suggest that the status of the system, although semi-permeable, can facilitate further development for both parties. Both parties were very keen to establish greater ties to give the tourism sector a competitive advantage. However, neither party had the foresight to make the initial move to initiate a symbiotic relationship.

Relationship Development and Management

Relationship development and management were conceptualized as policies and practices that are necessary to initiate and sustain the relationship. They represent the mechanisms in place to develop and sustain the relationship. The question focused on the development and maintenance of the relationship between the units to enhance the communication between the sectors and, by extension, the competitive advantage of the tourism industry. The question asked was: “How can the tourism sector and the education sector build and sustain meaningful relationships that can benefit both parties?” The responses from both parties indicate that there is a need for both to be a part of the planning

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process, and to develop a network between the two sectors to ensure that education remains relevant to the needs of the industry. All of the employers and educators saw the need to establish collaboration between the two units. Three prominent themes emerging from the data were: the need to establish networks between the units; the need for trainers to have industry experience to execute their duties more efficiently; and the need for employers to play a pivotal role in curriculum planning.

Networking. The educators also suggested the need for networking between the parties for greater efficiency. As one lecturer indicated:

“We need to establish strong links with the industry so that specific needs will be met and the education provider makes itself more visible in terms of what it produces so that society will see the benefits of the programme.”

The employers in the tourism sector also endorsed the need to establish links. One restaurateur indicated that:

“the industry has tried to establish a link with the institution, especially in food and beverage.”

There was also the call for an advisory committee to initiate and maintain a relationship among all parties concerned.

Experienced trainers. One pertinent issue that emerged from the data is the quality of trainers at the institution. The employers commended the theoretical knowledge of the instructors; however, they were concerned about their field experience. This was explained by the human resource manager in the accommodation sector:

“There is a need to equip all technical vocational institutions with persons who are leaders in their field. That is, personnel who possess a sound background and good training. The personnel need to have industry experience and to keep abreast with the changes in the industry.”

The issue of the perceived disconnect between established standards in the industry and what is happening at the institution was noted also. An employer in accommodation suggested that the institution:

“expose tutors to an internship in the industry and as a result, the tutors will train students to meet the standards expected by the industry.”

The concern was also expressed by the curriculum development specialist, who felt that:

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“the lecturers are competent but there is need for frequent placement in the industry. This will help the institution identify skill levels from the prospective employers.”

The role of the employers in curriculum planning. The role of employers in curriculum planning was seen as an element that could help to develop a symbiotic relationship between the units. One lecturer in the institution proposed that industry partners should be part of the curriculum planning:

“By allowing the employers in the tourism sector to take part in curriculum planning we will have a better idea of what is needed and what courses we need to re-examine, courses that are no longer relevant and new courses to develop. The sector is dynamic so we need to keep up with the changes in the industry.”

The internship segment of the programme is important because students gain experience in the industry. The employers were of the view that instead of the institution assigning students to the industry, students should apply to different sectors where they would be interviewed before they were placed. One travel agent explained why students should be given a chance to apply for internship in a sector of choice:

“Let us interview the students; in that way they will not only get industry experience but they will go through the process of being interviewed. That being said students will feel a sense of achievement and also they will know that they are placed in a sector or department of their choice.”

A general consensus from the industry is that the industry had tried to get its members to keep an open mind and to show an interest in what is happening at the institution. They also indicated that some professionals in the industry needed no prompting and that they had taken the initiative to contact the institution and offer their services.

The results suggest that the development and maintenance of the relationship requires mutual exchange between both parties. The industry and the institution display a willingness to collaborate to ensure that the human resources that the industry requires are relevant to a dynamic industry.

Relationship Outcomes

For this paper, relationship outcomes looks at the benefits of the symbiotic relationship between the tourism sector and the education

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provider. The question asked was: “How would both parties benefit from a collaborative effort?” Two themes emerged: students’ benefits and industry benefits.

Students’ benefit. The employers looked at the benefits from the students’ standpoint. They all agreed that students would benefit from the relationship because they would gain a better understanding of what is expected from them, and it would also make hospitality education an attractive option. An employer from travel and attractions stated that:

“I do not get the impression that hospitality education is the first port of call for students. As a result, there exists a last resort mentality from the students. The industry, with effective collaboration, can counteract this mentality by exposing the students to the realities of the industry and its possibilities.”

The lecturers also indicated that students would benefit from the relationship. They concluded that if there is a collaborative initiative between the industry and education, students would benefit. As one lecturer succinctly concluded: *“The students will be at an advantage because they will have the best of both worlds.”*

Industry benefits. All respondents mentioned the benefits to the industry. It was noted by a restaurateur that this level of collaboration between the two entities would augur well for the industry. They would have the quality employees in their organization that would enhance the competitive advantage of the industry:

“I see the industry benefitting from this kind of collaboration in a positive way. We will get quality personnel in our organisations, we know what we want and we can indicate to the institution what type of worker they should produce for us.”

The relationship outcome can be viewed from the student standpoint or the industry standpoint. If relationships are developed and managed effectively, there could be a win-win outcome for both the industry and education providers.

Conclusion

The tourism industry has played a pivotal role in the economic and social landscape of the Caribbean. Many countries in the Caribbean depend on tourism for sustainable development. The revenue generated from tourism-related activities is injected directly into hotels, shops, restaurants, and recreational facilities. The interconnectedness of the world's economies makes the industry volatile and susceptible to seemingly unrelated events and economic conditions in other countries. In the best times and in the worst times, the market-oriented development strategies and the increasing pressures from the world economy will determine the direction of the industry. Caribbean governments have little control over the prevailing market conditions; however, they have direct control with respect to improving the quality of the tourism product. There is every indication that there will be greater demand for quality service, and less patience and tolerance from the global market for the Caribbean to request more time to adjust to the new demands or conditions of the market. The competitive advantage of the island is dependent on adequately trained workers in the industry. The results of this study show that the quality of human resource has been a major hurdle for many employers in the industry. One of the lamentations of the employers in the industry is the low productivity and the gaps in quality of customer relations and customer service. It is noted that the quality of the human capital in the industry will impact on the competitive advantage of the industry. In many countries, there have been attempts to enhance the quality of the human resource through formal pre-service and in-service training of personnel. The findings shed an interesting light on the relationship between the hospitality industry and the institution serving that industry.

The findings suggest that one unit alone cannot attempt to carry the responsibility of developing and maintaining the relationship on its shoulders. The educators alone do not hold the key to the success of training quality personnel. Collaboration between the units would yield the greatest influence on the tourism product. A symbiotic relationship between the units must be maintained in order to enable sustainable tourism. In that regard, stakeholders in the industry need to collaborate with the education providers to ensure the sustainability of the industry. Tourism education, from a relationship management perspective, could further extend the contribution by the stakeholders in the industry. This model is not a panacea for all the issues highlighted in this paper, but it can address the issues of collaboration and networking among the units.

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The tourism product is dynamic and it is vital that the relationship established should be managed to realize the expected outcomes. It is recommended, therefore, that the stakeholders in the industry revisit the relationship that exists among the units, explore ways to develop a symbiotic relationship that will enhance the quality of the product, and establish mechanisms to maintain sustainable relationships that will directly and indirectly enhance the competitive advantage of the tourism product.

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