

# Management Competencies and Tourism Graduates: Future Leaders of Caribbean Tourism

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## Abstract

■ The Caribbean is challenged to remain competitive in a dynamic global tourism arena. Tourism education plays a critical role in preparing individuals to effectively manage this industry in order to gain that competitive edge. The focus of this study is the determination of the essential management competencies of tourism graduates. The findings reveal that the focus of the tourism programme should be on producing graduates that are flexible, ethical and knowledgeable. The onus is on tourism educators to establish close collaboration among key stakeholders to ensure that there is understanding as to what is of critical importance in preparing future Caribbean leaders.

*Key Words:*

Tourism, Management, Competencies, Education, Curriculum

## Resumen

■ El Caribe tiene el reto de seguir siendo competitivo en el escenario de un turismo mundial dinámico. La educación turística desempeña un papel fundamental en la preparación de las personas que pueda gestionar eficazmente esta industria, con el fin de obtener una ventaja competitiva. El objetivo de este estudio es la determinación de las competencias de gestión esenciales en los graduados de turismo. Los resultados revelan que el enfoque del programa de turismo debe producir graduados que sean flexibles, éticos y bien informados. Es responsabilidad de los educadores del turismo establecer una estrecha colaboración entre las principales partes interesadas, para asegurarse de que hay un entendimiento de lo que es de vital importancia en la preparación de los futuros líderes del Caribe.

*Palabras clave:*

Turismo, Gestión, Competencias, Educación, Currículo

## Introduction

■ The international tourism landscape has changed dramatically over the last ten years with the industry welcoming *new* players, adapting to *new* tourists and responding to *new* crises. In the midst of this changing landscape, one constant over the last three decades has been the resiliency of the industry as a viable economic sector. For the majority of Small Island Developing States in the Caribbean tourism remains an economic panacea. The real challenge for Caribbean islands is how to become and remain competitive in this new environment. According to Ritchie and Crouch (2003), a critical supporting factor for a competitive destination is adequate facilitating resources i.e. well educated and well trained human resources. Therefore, the provision of high-quality education and training is germane to the future competitiveness of the region.

It is against this background that this paper firstly seeks to identify the core management competencies of tourism graduates of the University of the West Indies (UWI). With this in mind, the views of three main stakeholders were elicited including University Faculty, Industry Managers and Students of the Tourism programmes. Secondly, the paper further compares the views of the stakeholders on the different management competencies. Thirdly, emphasis will be placed on the extent to which this knowledge should be used in the development of the tourism curriculum at the UWI.

One of the challenges faced by Tourism academics is the determination of an appropriate balance in the tourism curriculum offering that satisfies the interests and or needs of the key stakeholders including industry, academia and the students. In the Caribbean context, there is the additional demand from regional governments and the local communities for tourism education to respond to specific issues that are integral to the development of tourism in the region. Given the importance of tourism to the economic survival of the Caribbean, it is imperative that tourism educators particularly at the tertiary level, carefully consider the core competencies required of graduates so that they can effectively contribute to building a sustainable regional tourism society. It is with this in mind that the discussion continues with an examination of the different approaches to tourism education, management competencies as a core component of tourism education and then an overview of tourism education at the UWI.

## The Tourism Curriculum: a contested space

■ Tourism as an industry is enormously diverse in terms of the range of sectors it encompasses and the variety of organisations it incorporates. With the tourism industry cutting across many sectors, namely accommodation-

related activities, leisure and recreation services, and impinging upon a wide range of operations, educators are faced with a bewildering choice of markets at which their products should be pitched. It is against this background of fragmentation that tourism education has developed. As a result of this multi-faceted nature of the tourism industry, there is an ongoing debate as to the purpose or aim of tourism education. This debate revolves around the four strands of higher education – a student centred approach; a work-centred approach; a society-centred approach and a balanced approach.

Cooper and Shepherd (1997:35), adopting a student-centred approach noted that,

“...education for tourism focuses on the process which gives an individual a set of principles and the necessary skills to interpret evaluate and analyse, that is, it develops the critical capabilities of the student and encourages the understanding of conceptual issues in order to contribute to professional and intellectual development.”

Implicit in this view of tourism education is an emphasis on generic, life long learning skills that will be necessary for the student’s intellectual development as well as useful for any job now and in the future. In agreement with this view, Gamble (1992) argues that there needs to be a movement away from the traditional knowledge-based approach to education towards a focus on the student’s development of the right attitudes and insights necessary to perform effectively in his chosen occupation.

Other commentators have been more pointed in their interpretation of the aims of tourism education by suggesting that the principal aim of tourism education should be the preparation of graduates for employment in the tourism industry (work-centred approach) (Buchicchio, 1991; Koh, 1995; Mc Intosh, 1992). The rationale for this argument is that tourism education exists to meet the needs of the tourism industry. In his research on designing the four-year tourism curriculum in North America Koh (1995) substantiates this argument further by eliciting the views of representatives from the industry on their expectations of tourism education.

Go (1994:331) offers an alternative society-centred perspective to tourism education suggesting that,

“...the long-term aim of educational efforts should be to shape growth in host communities through sustainable tourism that not only raises the standard of living but also improves the quality of life for local residents in destination areas.”

Go’s underlying thesis is that the foundation for determining what knowledge and skills learners need is to understand and to contribute to the improvement of the wider society educators are preparing them for. This

implies wide social science knowledge and understanding of the meaning systems of tourism and tourism's context in order that the graduate can contribute usefully to forward planning, policy analysis and informed management. This society-centred approach to tourism education did not gain ground in the more developed nations of North America and the UK where the focus seems to be more on tourism education and its relationship with the industry. However, in research conducted on tourism education in developing countries, it is suggested that the needs of the destination be placed at the forefront of tourism curriculum planning (Theuns and Go, 1992; Echtner, 1995; Lewis, 2005).

Clearly, there are different agendas regarding tourism education. Here we see the opposition of tourism education with a focus on a critical understanding of tourism and the issues in the wider society and tourism education emphasising knowledge and skills for employment in the tourism industry. Pring (1995:134) challenged what he refers to as "the 'false dualisms' between a knowledge-centred approach and a work-centred approach, which fragment the educational system and impoverish the experience of everyone". He hastened to add though that there are important differences between these approaches that must be considered. What Pring (1995) suggests is a balancing of the approaches. Such a view would produce a more comprehensive perspective to tourism education such as that offered by Burke *et al* (1990:685) indicating that,

"...the goal of a tourism program should be to develop broadly educated students who are both knowledgeable about tourism and aware of its interrelated and interdependent nature..... In addition, the program should be conceptually based, yet balanced between theory, knowledge and practical skills."

They further add that what is needed to accomplish this goal is a conceptual framework composed of four elements: the dynamic element-the tourism phenomenon; the services element-the tourism system; the functional element-tourism management; and the impact element-goal optimisation.

What emerges from this discussion is the notion that the aims of tourism education can be placed on a continuum. On one end of the continuum are the purely work-centred aims and on the other reside the purely society-centred aims. Between the two extremes are combinations of both these aims. Tribe (2002) captures this idea in what he refers to as 'curriculum space'. He provides a useful framework within which the aims (and content) of the tourism curriculum can be classified and further analysed. In his words,

"...the curriculum can be filled with different knowledge, skills and attitudes. Students embarking on tourism courses take different educational jour-

neys according to the way in which their curriculum has been framed. Different framings mean that students will exit tourism courses with a variety of perspectives, attitudes and competencies" (Tribe, 2002:340)

The point about curriculum space is that there is a range of possible influences from different stakeholders with diverse interests that may seek to exercise their influence (to varying degrees) over curriculum content. The determination of the core competencies for a tourism programme depends to a large extent on the strength of the influence of relevant stakeholders.

## Management Competency Research

■ Based on the above discussion, the challenge for tourism educators is filling curriculum space with the right balance of knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviours based on the context within which the tourism programme is situated. As such, competencies are a critical component of curriculum space. Competencies have been defined by Boyatzis (1982:21) as an underlying characteristic of a person in that it may be a motive, trait, skill, or aspect of one's self-image or social role, or body of knowledge which he or she uses. Nordhaug and Gronhaug (1994: 89) further included work related knowledge, skills and abilities. The main thrust of competencies is to show the relationship between perceived performance, anticipated future performance and expected performance (Antonacopoulou & Fitzgerald, 1996). For the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on management competencies which refer to skills, knowledge and behaviours to be demonstrated at a specific level of proficiency by managers (Evers, Rush & Berdrow, 1998).

Several studies have examined management competencies in the various sectors of the tourism industry including the lodging industry, the restaurant industry, the private club industry or other service operations attempting to identify competencies that were important for managerial success (Bonn, 1986; Tas 1988; Kaufman *et al.*, 1996; Birdir & Pearson, 2000; Christou, 2000; Chung-Herrera *et al.*, 2003; Kay & Moncarz, 2004). The earliest study conducted on management competencies in the hotel sector by Tas (1988) identified 36 competencies for hotel general manager trainees. The results of the study identified six (6) 'soft skills' as essential competencies. These were classified as managing guest problems, professional and ethical standards, professional appearance and poise, effective communication, positive customer relations, and positive working relationships. Tas and Baum did a follow up study in the UK and Christou (2000) replicated this study in Greece. According to Christou (2000:1059), "even six years after the first two studies similar results to those by Tas and Baum resurface. This has to be taken seriously by hospitality educators in Greece and elsewhere".

Warner (1991) conducted a number of studies exploring the importance of managerial competencies for recreational food service managers. Results showed that recreational food service managers mainly valued specialized knowledge, followed by human resource skills, goal and action management skills and leadership skills. In a study conducted by Reynolds (2000:97), 17 executives from leading chain-restaurant organizations identified interpersonal skills, passion/enthusiasm for their job, honesty, organizational skills, leadership skills, an ability to handle stress, restaurant experience, a focus on the customer, job related self confidence, and creativity as essential competencies for food service managers. In the private club industry, Koenigsfeld (2007) noted that leadership, interpersonal, and accounting and finance competencies under the administrative domain, according to Sandwith (1993) competency domain model, were rated the most important by the sample of club managers surveyed in his study. Of the twenty-eight (28) essential competencies identified in the study, ten (10) came directly from the leadership domain.

## **Tourism Education at UWI**

■ The UWI has been identified as the primary institution in the Caribbean region with the responsibility of contributing towards meeting the tourism human resource needs by preparing graduates to assume management roles in the industry. As a number of destinations began to approach the development stage in their life cycle in the 1970s there was an urgent need for the education and training of local managers for the regional hotel and tourism industry. In response to this need, the UWI Department of Management Studies established in Jamaica a Hotel Management degree programme in 1977. UWI's degree programme was designed to educate, train and generally prepare Caribbean students to assume future leadership roles in the region's hospitality and tourism industry. As the name suggests, the programme focused specifically on hotel management and thus there was limited or no attention given to the wider socio-economic and cultural issues arising from tourism development in the region. It was not until 1983 that a Bachelor's degree in Tourism Management was introduced to address some of these key issues.

To date, the three (3) campuses of the UWI offer both undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Tourism and Hospitality. At the undergraduate level, the focus of this paper, there is a combination of Four-Year Joint B.Sc. Degrees in Hospitality and Tourism Management and Three-Year B.Sc. degrees offered fully by the UWI. In terms of the former, the UWI has established five associations with tertiary institutions in Jamaica, Barbados, Bahamas, Antigua and Trinidad. These associations are commonly referred to as a 2+2 arrangement whereby students are required to complete two years at the partnering

institution after which they receive an Associate Degree in Hospitality and Tourism Management. The students then have the choice to complete the final two years at any one of the three UWI campuses. In general, both the 2+2 programme and the Three year degree programme are designed to meet the needs of the hospitality and tourism market and the aims of the programmes are noted as:

- Immediate functional competencies
- An entrepreneurial and innovative attitude to work
- A good overall knowledge of the business and competitive environments in the industry
- Strong people skills
- Language and cultural sophistication, awareness and appreciation
- A strong sense of social obligations and environmental responsibilities of the industry
- Strong self-learning orientation
- Respect for vocational work
- A self-conscious identification with the industry (problems and solutions) (Jayawardena and Cooke, 2002:53)

The focus of the programme clearly emphasises the business and technical skills needed for a career in the industry. Given the critical importance of tourism to Caribbean island economies, tourism educators are faced with the challenge of ensuring that the curriculum prepares students to plan, manage and develop tourism in the islands, as well as, responds to the key global and local issues that affect the wider society. In other words, attention must be placed on how the socio-cultural, political and economic issues can be reflected in the vocational and liberal agenda of the tourism curriculum. The consensus among a number of stakeholders that were interviewed in the region is that tourism knowledge in the curriculum for the Caribbean should embrace the whole field of tourism studies, both tourism business studies and non-tourism business studies. The rationale here is that this balance in knowledge enables students to better analyse the tourism phenomenon in the islands and places them in a better position to make informed decisions as potential leaders regarding the growth of tourism (Lewis, 2005).

## **Methodology**

■ The Hospitality and Tourism Management programmes offered by the UWI are housed in the Department of Management Studies. As a consequence, students are

required to complete several core management courses. The challenge for tourism educators is finding the right balance (Pring, 1995) between the business and non-business components of the programmes. Therefore, the focus of this research is the determination of the essential management competencies of students graduating from the undergraduate hospitality and tourism programmes specifically at the St. Augustine, Trinidad campus. Only the St. Augustine campus was identified for this research as some difficulty was experienced in accessing graduates from the programmes in Jamaica and Barbados.

For the purposes of this paper, Sandwith's (1993) Competency Domain Model which encompasses five (5) domains of management competencies will be used. This model was chosen as it is the most comprehensive in terms of capturing the main dimensions of management. "A competency model is a descriptive tool that identifies the knowledge, skills, abilities and behavior needed to perform effectively in an organization" (Chung-Herrera, Enz & Lankau, 2003, 17). Sandwith's model provides a comprehensive overview of the various clusters of management competencies. The five domains include conceptual/creative, interpersonal, leadership, administrative, and technical. The conceptual/creative domain refers to cognitive skills associated with comprehending important elements of the job. The leadership domain is concerned with empowerment and being a role model and a mentor within an organization. The interpersonal domain focuses on interaction with others. The fourth domain is the administrative domain which includes people management skills, financial management, marketing, and complying and handling legal issues. The final domain is the technical domain which refers to the actual work that the organization does (Sandwith, 1993).

Quantitative research was chosen for this study as the majority of competency based research reviewed in hospitality and tourism are purely quantitative studies. Furthermore, a quantitative approach allows for the use of statistical methods to analyze the data and generalize the findings from a sample to a population. The participants for this study included University Faculty in the Department of Management Studies; hospitality and tourism leaders who are members of the Trinidad and Tobago Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Association and; graduates from the B.Sc. Hospitality and Tourism programmes between 2006 and 2010. This period was selected as the Three Year degree was introduced in 2006.

An online survey was developed using a Five point Likert scale allowing participants to rate the level of importance of each variable in the (5) clusters of the competency domain model. The scale included 1= Not Important; 2= Somewhat Important; 3=Important; 4= Very Important; 5= Critically Important. According to Tas (1988) the competency responses can be categorized as essential, when the mean rating is over 4.50, of considerable

importance when it is between 3.50 and 4.49 and, moderately important when between 2.50 and 3.49.

## Findings

Questionnaires were sent to the sixteen (16) Faculty members in the Department of Management Studies. Seven (7) questionnaires were returned. Twenty (20) hospitality and tourism leaders were contacted but only eight (8) managers responded. E-mails were sent to fifty (50) graduates of the B.Sc. Hospitality and Tourism programmes between 2006 and 2010 with thirty-seven (37) responses. The overall response rate for the study was 60% which was calculated by dividing the 52 returned questionnaires by the 86 surveys sent.

Using Tas (1988) categorization of competency responses, the industry leaders reported that 2 of the 28 competencies were essential, 21 were of considerable importance and 5 were moderately important. The University Faculty identified 4 competencies as essential, 20 as considerably important and 4 as moderately important. Unlike the other two groups, the students did not report any of the competencies as moderately important. Rather, they noted 2 competencies as essential and 26 of the 28 of considerable importance. Table 1 shows the means for each stakeholder group.

Both Industry Leaders and Faculty identified "Adapts creatively to changing circumstances" and "Considers ethical implications prior to taking actions" as the two essential management competencies for Tourism graduates. The other two essential competencies highlighted by Faculty were "Translates business strategies into clear objectives and tactics" and "Stays informed about industry practices and new developments". From the Students' perspective the two essential competencies noted were "Safeguards confidential information" and "Adheres to basic laws relating to general operations of the organization".

In terms of the management competencies that were considered moderately important, Industry Leaders pinpointed the following:

- Presents ideas in a convincing manner
- Expresses disagreement in a tactful and sensitive manner
- Prepares and presents effective oral and written presentations
- Delegates effectively to others
- Uses basic management approaches such as democratic and autocratic as appropriate for specific management situations

**Table 1 Results of Management Competencies by Stakeholders**

Competency	Students	Industry	Academia
Adapts creatively to changing circumstances	4.0556	4.8000	4.8333
Anticipates obstacles and develops contingency plans	4.3333	4.3000	4.0000
Identifies measurable action steps that support the organization's strategy and mission	4.1389	3.8000	4.1667
Translates business strategies into clear objectives and tactics	4.0278	4.0000	4.5000
Develops new ideas	4.2778	3.5000	3.5000
Comprehends and fosters the organization's culture, values, beliefs, vision and norms	4.1944	3.5000	3.3333
Seeks feedback from others and listens to people without interrupting	4.3235	3.8000	3.5000
Displays consistency between words and actions	4.0556	3.6000	3.6667
Presents ideas in a convincing manner	4.0278	3.3000	4.3333
Expresses disagreement in a tactful and sensitive manner	4.1714	3.3000	3.5000
Gives specific, timely and constructive feedback	4.3333	3.6000	3.5000
Writes in an effective manner	4.1389	3.5000	4.0000
Speaks clearly and articulately in a variety of situations	4.1944	3.6000	3.8333
Negotiates in an effective manner	3.9167	3.5000	3.5000
Prepares and presents effective oral and written presentations	4.1111	3.4000	3.6667
Manages time to ensure productivity	4.4444	4.1000	3.5000
Works constructively under stress and pressure	4.2222	4.0000	4.1667
Stays informed about industry practices and new developments	4.3143	3.9000	4.5000
Addresses and works through conflict	4.1389	3.6000	3.6667
Adjusts behavior in response to feedback and experience	4.0278	3.6000	3.8333
Delegates effectively to others	3.8889	3.2000	3.3333
Considers ethical implications prior to taking actions	4.1667	4.5000	4.6667
Inspires and helps motivate others	3.8333	3.5000	3.5000
Pursues continual learning and self development	4.1111	3.8000	4.1667
Employs a team approach to solve problems when appropriate	3.7222	3.7778	3.3333
Uses basic management approaches such as democratic and autocratic as appropriate for specific management situations	3.5278	3.2000	3.3333
Safeguards confidential information	4.7222	4.4000	4.3333
Adheres to basic laws relating to general operations of the organization	4.5278	4.1000	4.1667

Source: Obtained from this study

For the Faculty members surveyed, the management competencies considered moderately important included:

- *Uses basic management approaches such as democratic and autocratic as appropriate for specific management situations*
- *Delegates effectively to others*
- Employs a team approach to solve problems when appropriate
- Comprehends and fosters the organization's culture, values, beliefs, vision and norms

## Discussion and Conclusion

■ As indicated at the outset of this discussion, the global tourism industry is constantly changing thus demanding tourism graduates that are flexible and able to function effectively in a dynamic environment. It is not surprising that both Industry Leaders and Faculty acknowledge how critical the ability to adapt to changing circumstances is in ensuring the future competitiveness of the tourism industry in the Caribbean. According to research conducted by (Jayawardena and Cooke, 2002) the tourism curriculum throughout the UWI focuses on business and technical know how. Clearly, this vocational emphasis in the curriculum is still supported by University Faculty as evidenced by two of the four essential competencies identified by Faculty. Based on the findings from this research, more attention must be given to encouraging students to think critically, engage in more problem solving exercises and to participate in more industry related projects.

The issue of ethical considerations in decision making has come to the fore in this study. This is a reflection of the importance placed on ethics in the different sectors within the tourism industry globally. Some of the causes of ethical concern in the industry include the encouragement of inappropriate social behaviour, e.g. child sex tourism; exploitative practices of businesses; poor conditions of employment. The latter is of particular concern in a Caribbean context. With the continued growth in tourism, its growing economic importance, and interaction with an increasing variety of cultural and physical environments it can be expected that tourism will raise more and more ethical questions in the future. For the tourism curriculum the issue is whether ethics should be embedded in all courses or be developed as a stand alone course. At the UWI, the course "Business Ethics" is a stand alone elective course offered to final year students. Based on the importance given to ethics in these findings, consideration should be given to ethics being embedded in all tourism management courses.

The findings revealed that the essential competencies delineated by the stakeholders are located within Sandwith's (1993) Creative and Leadership domains whereas the moderately important management competencies are found in the Interpersonal and Administrative domains. It is noteworthy that the 'softer skills' located in the Interpersonal domain were not ranked as highly as the competencies in the Creative or Leadership domains as was the case in research conducted by Tas (1988) and Christou (2000). Of the nine competencies in the Interpersonal domain, three were highlighted by Industry Leaders as moderately important. In the UWI curriculum, much emphasis is placed on these three identified areas so much so that the University has established a Writing Centre; 'English for Academic Purposes' is a compulsory course for all students and oral presentations are a compulsory part of the majority of management courses. The University has recognized the shortcomings among the students in these areas and has taken remedial as well as preventative action. One can assume from the findings that Industry Leaders are willing to harness these skills on the job.

The Faculty members surveyed considered a team approach to problem solving, delegating and the use of different management approaches as moderately important. At the UWI, teamwork is a critical component of the coursework in the majority of courses. The teaching of different approaches to management is also germane to the management courses. There seems to be a disconnect between what is taught and the views of the Faculty. Maybe there is the thinking that it is important to Industry and hence it is taught. However, the findings reveal that these variables do not rank highly on Industry Leaders' list of what is essential. The issue here is the extent to which teamwork should be encouraged in the coursework and the real value of the use of management approaches in the workplace.

In conclusion, based on Tribe's (2002) framework of curriculum space, the findings suggest that the tourism management curriculum at the UWI must be balanced with a mix of competencies primarily from the Creative, Leadership and Administrative domains. The essential competencies noted by the three stakeholder groups signal that the focus of the tourism programme at the UWI should be on producing graduates that are flexible, ethical and knowledgeable in their specific field of study. To this end, there must be a closer collaboration among these stakeholder groups to ensure that there is understanding as to what is of critical importance as the Caribbean seeks to gain a competitive edge in the global tourism industry.

In terms of future research, it would be useful to conduct a similar survey at the other two campuses to determine if these results will be applicable in those contexts. Furthermore, in developing the tourism curriculum across the UWI campuses, an examination should be done on

other core competencies, notably, technical, cultural to better prepare students to engage more effectively with the current tourism environment.

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