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RESEARCH NOTE

Degree of motivation of international hospitality students in their work place

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Abstract

The research aimed to investigate international students' levels of motivation to work in the hospitality industry. A survey was conducted with 193 international hospitality students in Brisbane and the Gold Coast, Southeast Queensland, Australia. The research, using expectancy motivation theory, found that the level of motivation during their industry experience programs was not high. This outcome should provide valuable information for education providers and industry practitioners to help them improve motivation levels of international students who study hospitality programmes overseas.

Keywords: international students; hospitality industry; job motivation

Introduction

International education is one of the world's fastest growth export sectors. By 2025, the global demand for international higher education is expected to grow to 7.2 million with a compound growth rate of 5.8% (Wisansing, 2008). The export of education from Australia grew rapidly during the 1990s (Michael, Armstrong, & King, 2003) and its contribution to the Australian economy reached A\$4.2 billion (US\$3.78 billion) in 2001 (Böhm, Davies, Meares, & Pearce, 2002). The average annual growth rate per year, from 1997 to 2003, in the number of international students studying in Australian higher education institutions was 15.3%, much higher than that of other major education export countries, such as the USA (4.9%) and the UK (3.5%) (Meares, 2003). In 2003, Australia became the fourth most popular educational destination, with roughly 10% of the international student population in the world ("Study Abroad", 2005). The number of international students in Australia more than doubled from 46,600 to 108,600 during the period 1992 to 2000 (Barron, 2004), and reached an overall total of 115,365 in the first semester of 2003 (International Development Program Education Australia, 2003).

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From a hospitality industry perspective, students are important as a temporary human resource: the majority of hospitality education providers require students to complete a certain number of hours of industry experience before graduation (Griffith University, 2008; Queensland Institute of Business Technology, 2008; South Bank Institute, 2008).

One of the main reasons for international students, particularly Asian students, to study abroad is because they can gain work experience during or after their study ("Study Abroad", 2005). Their work experience in an overseas advanced country is highly respected and advantageous for them when they look for jobs and develop an industry career in their own country. Legally, international students in Australia may work up to 20 hours per week during the semester period and unlimited hours off-semester. Working while studying also has financial advantages. Thus it is likely that the working environment affects students' selection of country for study. Therefore, motivation and satisfaction work experience is important and an area worthy of investigation.

The aim of this study was to identify international students' levels of motivation when working in the hospitality industry in Australia.

Personal characteristics in motivation

Motivation at work or the reasons why people work has been researched previously and many psychological theories of motivation have been developed. An early theory by Maslow (1954) proposed a hierarchy of five levels of human need to explain human behaviour. Each need comprises a large number of different behaviours but those behaviours were categorised into five levels: (a) physiological needs, (b) need for security, (c) need to belong, (d) need for recognition and esteem (separated into two, self-respect and respect from others), and (e) need for self-actualisation. The theory is classified as an internal and contents approach in its basic thought, and also fits the reinforcement and cognitive approaches (Thierry, 1998).

However, Maslow's theory has faced criticisms because of its clear division of needs. According to Alderfer (1972), human behaviour can be affected by many different factors and he identified three human needs rather than five: existence (safety/physiological needs), relatedness (social), and growth (self-actualisation/ esteem). His theory argued that two categories of need could appear at the same time to explain human behaviour. Locke and Latham (1990) pointed out that the above theory does not provide an exact measurement of each individual motivation stage. These theories do not consider individual variables, such as a person's personality and skill level (Huizinga, 1970; Pinder, 1984).

Environmental characteristics in motivation

Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman (1959) identified two categories of influential factors on human behaviour: hygiene factors and motivator factors. Company policies, administration, supervision, working conditions, interpersonal relations, money, status and security fall into hygiene factors, also called maintenance factors. According to his study, when hygiene factors were satisfied dissatisfaction and work restrictions were eliminated, but growth in worker output capacity was not achieved. In other words, hygiene factors affect an individual's willingness in a positive way but the effect stops there.

Motivator factors consist of achievement, recognition for accomplishment, challenging work, increased responsibility, and growth and development. Herzberg et al. (1959) insisted that motivator factors could affect job output capacity in a positive way when they were satisfied. As Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson (2001) noted, Maslow's theory is helpful for identifying needs or motives and Herzberg et al.'s theory provides insights into the goals and incentives that tend to satisfy those needs.

The concept of self-efficacy is related to the concept of expectancy in the expectancy theory (Bandura, 1986). The concept also has potential to be used to predict performance behaviour (Thierry, 1998). Bandura also presented the concept of regulation instead of reinforcement to explain human behaviour. The concept of regulation was not interpreted as

a simple mechanical response, but an information process for generating effective behaviour. It can also be interpreted as motivation that comes from expectation, generated by previous experience and modelling.

To form a more inclusive explanation of motivation for different human behaviours, motivation studies have changed to focus on the interactions between people and their environment (Dipboye, Smith, & Howell, 1994). In other words, studies have become more concerned with how and why motivations occur. These studies emphasise purposeful, conscious thought and cognitive process in human behaviour. This study mainly examines the expectancy value theory.

Expectancy theory

An important aspect of early studies of expectancy theory was the change from the previous dominant view of human behaviour which saw human behaviour as inherently motivated or unmotivated (Georgopoulos, Mahoney, & Jones, 1957). In expectancy theory, individuals are seen as thinking and reasoning individuals who make conscious choices about present and future behaviour. Also motivation is determined by the particular work environment (Ross, 1994).

Major refinements by Porter and Lawler (1968) and Lawler (1973) added more concepts to the original theory. Thierry (1998) introduced the idea that each person's habits and general experience influence their motives and expectations. Similarly, individual features, such as a person's competences, perception of their role at work, different styles of approach toward problems, and type of task or work, also appeared as new elements influencing the process between effort and performance. The appraisal procedure adopted by the supervisor was added as an influencing element between performance and outcome. Norms and value were also considered as influencing outcome and satisfaction.

Lawler (1973) introduced two different expectancies: effort-performance expectancy and performance-outcome expectancy. The former represents the belief that individual efforts will lead to successful performance; the latter represents the belief that a successful performance in a given situation will lead to a certain desirable outcome.

Campbell and Pritchard (1976) supported the expectancy theory's multiplicative method for the calculation of motivational force. Also, a later discussion on using the expectancy theory for analysing occupational and organisational choice (Wanous, Keon, & Latack, 1983) recommended the within-subjects approach and its multiplicative fashion for data analysis. However, some technical problems were discovered after the original theory was published. One of the problems related to the list of standard outcomes in the model. Matsui and Ikeda (1976) found, through their study of effectiveness of self-generation outcome in expectancy theory, that the theory was more likely to be supported if the researcher allowed the subjects to generate their own list of outcomes. Although some empirical research supported the multiplicative calculation of the motivational force, others (Stahl & Harrell, 1981) insisted that the original model generated an unnecessary complexity by using the multiplicative formula. The difficulty of distinguishing between the concept of effort and the concept of performance in the respondent's behaviour cycle was also highlighted (Thierry, 1998).

Methodology

A pilot study was carried out at the Queensland Institute of Business and Technology (QIBT) with six international students who were enrolled in the hospitality programme. Another pre-test was performed at a university in Queensland with six international students on the same programme. The main data collection method was the individually-completed questionnaire. The method was used because the questionnaire took a relatively short time to complete and the institutions only allowed the researchers a short time, generally 10 to 15 minutes per class, to collect information from the students. Students were studying for a diploma in hotel or hospitality management, a bachelor of hotel management or a bachelor of business majoring in hotel management at QIBT, a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) college or a university in Southeast Queensland. Most of the students were in their second or third year

at their institutions. As they already had experience in the industry, they could describe how they felt about the industry with respect to their motivation. All data were converted to a numerical code and retyped into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 13.0 programme for analysis.

The dependent variable was the level of motivation during their industry experience. The independent variable was the international students, with the moderating variable being the industry experience programme. The method easily provided coded information for clear analysis. There were three scales in this research: nominal, interval and ratio. The questionnaire contained different scales because the complexities of the questions varied. The normal and ratio scales were used for measuring demographic and industry experience information, whereas the interval scales mainly used a five-point Likert-type scale for measuring motivation.

To measure specific motivational factors, parts of the first section of the questionnaire contained point scales rather than the five-point scale. The interval scales were closely related with an itemised rating scale (Sekaran, 2000). To measure the intensity of some dimensions of motivation, the Stapel scale and the Likert scale were applied. These scales were used because they were useful for attitude measurements; it was simple for the respondents to complete and easy for the researcher to analyse (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Velde, Jansen, & Anderson, 2004).

The language used in the questionnaire was of particular concern because of the composition of the target group. Since the research aimed to access the opinions of international students, the questionnaire did not use specific jargon or difficult words. However, it used some specific industry terms such as room division, food and beverage department and job transfer. Commands were not used in the questionnaire; instead it used "polite" language to stimulate answers (Velde et al., 2004). The questionnaire consisted of two sections: motivation, and demographics and industry experience. The questionnaire was adapted from Spector's (1996) research questionnaire. Each question asked for specific information about the students' experiences.

The collected data was analysed using descriptive (frequency tests, frequency rate, percentages, mean scores and standard errors of means) and explanatory (chi-square test and bivariate correlations) research methods to investigate the international students' levels of motivation. A paired sample test and an independent sample test were applied for the mean score comparison.

Demographic data of respondents

A total of 193 useful questionnaires were returned out of 200 distributed. The researchers were with the respondents while they completed the questionnaires, explaining the high response rate (96.5%). There were 92 male (42.7%) and 101 female students (52.3%). The majority were Asian (143 students/74.1%), with 50 Chinese (25.9%), 32 Korean (16.16%), and the remainder from Hong Kong, Japan and Taiwan. Among the non-Asian students (50 in total), were those from Norway (11), Brazil (7) and Sweden (5). Most of the respondents were between 20 and 25 years of age (169 students/87.6%). Of the respondents, 83 (43%) were on a diploma course in hospitality, whereas 110 (57%) were completing a bachelor level degree. In terms of work experience, 61 students (31.6%) reported that they had undertaken 2 to 3 months, 52 students (26.9%) 4 to 6 months, and 69 (35.8%) more than 6 months. It was found that 154 students (79.8%) held jobs related to the food and beverage department, while only 30 (15.5%) worked in the room division. Of the total, 130 students (71.1%) said that they had not changed jobs during their industry experience.

The majority of the students (124/64.2%) had less than 6 months industry experience. This could be a methodological limitation but, considering they were all international students staying for a comparatively short period of time in Australia, it was not an unexpected finding.

Results and discussion

Analysis of the level of motivation by the expectancy theory

The level of motivation by the expectancy theory was investigated with two different sets of questions. The main methods of data analysis here were frequency analysis, mean score comparison (paired sample *t*-test), chi-square test and the correlation test. The first question in each set of questions related to the level of expectancy of a particular outcome; the second questions were about the level of expectancy of the first outcome leading to the second outcome. The analysis then revealed the relationships between each of the two different questions sets.

From the frequency test, 112 out of 193 (58%) students expected that their best service would lead to guest compliments and 79 out of 193 (40.9%) said that they believed these compliments normally led to some positive recognition from their manager. The paired sample test revealed significant differences between the two mean scores for the two variables (significance level of 0.05). This indicates that the connection between the two different expectancy theory concepts was weak. Table 1 shows the paired sample statistics and test between the variables “Guest compliments for my good service” and “Guest compliments lead to recognition by my manager”.

| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | Std. error mean |
|---|----------|-----------|-----------------|
| Guest compliments for my good service | 3.58 | .86 | .062 |
| Guest compliments lead to recognition by my manager | 3.25 | .88 | .063 |

| | Paired differences | | | | | <i>t</i> | df | significance (2-tailed) |
|---|--------------------|-----------|-----------------|---|-------|----------|-----|-------------------------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | Std. error mean | 95% confidence interval of the difference | | | | |
| | | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| Guest compliments for my good service / Guest compliments lead to recognition by my manager | .33 | 1.04 | .08 | .18 | .48 | 4.44 | 192 | .00 |

Table 1: Paired sample statistics and test for “guest compliments” (N = 193)

The chi-square also showed a weak relationship between the two variables (χ^2 (12, $N = 193$) = 27.764, at significance level of 0.05). In addition, the directional measures indicated that there was a weak relationship between the two variables (0.04 and 0.05 between 0 and 1). Consequently, it could be argued that the students believed that their good service would lead to guest compliments; however, their good service did not necessarily lead to this being recognised by their managers. Table 2 presents the directional measures for the two variables.

| | Value | Approx. SE | Approx. T | Approx. significance |
|---|-------|------------|-----------|----------------------|
| Guest compliments for my good service | .04 | .02 | | .04 |
| Guest compliments lead to recognition by my manager | .03 | .01 | | .05 |
| Symmetric | .05 | .02 | 2.54 | .02 |

Table 2: Directional measures for “guest compliments”

In the frequency test, 131 (67.9%) students said that they expected to finish their job task faster if they worked harder, and 83 (43%) said they believed that finishing a job task faster always led to some recognition from the managers. The paired sample test indicated that there was a significant difference between the mean scores for these two variables (at significance level 0.05) indicating that the connection between the two expectancy theory concepts was weak. Table 3 provides the paired sample test for the variables “You work harder and finish job faster” and “Finishing job faster leads to recognition from your manager”.

| | M | SD | Std. error mean |
|---|------|-----|-----------------|
| You work harder and finish job faster | 3.74 | .76 | .05 |
| Finishing job faster leads to recognition from your manager | 3.23 | .92 | .07 |

| | Paired differences | | | | | t | df | significance (2-tailed) |
|---|--------------------|------|-----------------|---|-------|------|-----|-------------------------|
| | M | SD | Std. error mean | 95% confidence interval of the difference | | | | |
| | | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| You work harder and finish job faster / Finishing job faster leads to recognition from your manager | 0.51 | 0.99 | 0.07 | 0.37 | 0.65 | 7.12 | 192 | 0.00 |

Table 3: Paired sample statistics and test for “working harder and finishing job faster” (N = 193)

In contrast, the chi-square test indicated that there was a clear relationship between the two variables (with significance at the 0.05 level). However, the low value of both statistics (0.07 and 0.09, from 0 to 1) indicated that the strength of the relationship was still weak. Table 4 presents the directional measures for these variables.

| | Value | Approx. SE | Approx. T | Approx. significance |
|---|-------|------------|-----------|----------------------|
| You work harder and finish job faster | .074 | .025 | | .00 |
| Finishing job faster leads to recognition from your manager | .055 | .019 | | .00 |
| Symmetric | .087 | .025 | 3.30 | .001 |

Table 4: Directional measures for “working harder and finishing job faster”

From the above tests, although there are clear differences between mean scores, it can be said that some weak motivational elements were present among the students, and the level of motivation was not strong.

The most frequent score for motivational force for wage ($M = 1.86$) indicates that the majority of students (161/83.85%) had a middle range of motivational force for wage. It can also be interpreted that the majority of the students had a positive score of motivation for wage. The most frequent score of motivational force for recognition ($M = 2.72$) indicates that the majority of students (147/76.56%) had a middle range of motivational force for recognition (the score between 0 and 3.95). This is interpreted as the majority of students had a positive score of motivation for recognition. The most frequent score for motivational force for getting an award ($M = 2.37$) indicates that the majority of students (164/85.41%) had a middle range of motivational force for receiving an award (the score between 0 and 4.48). This is interpreted as the majority of students had a positive score for motivation for getting an award.

Through the three motivational score analyses of wage, recognition and getting an award, it is revealed that the majority of students had a positive score of motivational force for those three aspects. However, because the scores were average, the results do not indicate that the students were highly motivated during their industry experience.

In the mean score comparison of motivational force for wage, the result from “equal variances assumed” was used because Levene’s test for equality of variance was highly significant (0.39, higher than 0.05). The 2-tailed significance level was 0.76 (much higher than 0.05) and the 95% confidence interval of the difference contained zero in the range. Therefore, there was no difference between the male and female motivational forces for wage (significance level of 0.05) (see Table 5).

| | Levene's test for equality of variances | | t-test for equality of means | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|------------|------------------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|------------|
| | F | sig. | t | df | sig. (2-tailed) | Mean difference | Std. error difference | 95% confidence interval of the difference | |
| | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Equal variances assumed | .75 | .39 | -.31 | 190 | .76 | -.08 | .24 | -.56 | .41 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | -.31 | 189.97 | .76 | -.08 | .24 | -.56 | .41 |

Table 5: Independent sample test for motivational force by wage

For the mean score comparison of motivational force for awards, the result from “equal variances not assumed” was used because Levene’s test for the equality of variance was low (0.06, close to 0.05). The 2-tailed significance level was 0.57 (higher than 0.05) and the 95% confidence interval of the difference contained zero in the range. Thus, there was no difference between male and female motivational forces for awards (significance level of 0.05) (see Table 6).

| | Levene's test for equality of variances | | t-test for equality of means | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|------------|------------------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|------------|
| | F | sig. | t | df | sig. (2-tailed) | Mean difference | Std. error difference | 95% confidence interval of the difference | |
| | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Equal variances assumed | 3.59 | .06 | -.56 | 190 | .58 | -.15 | .27 | -.68 | .38 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | -.56 | 187.96 | .57 | -.15 | .26 | -.67 | .37 |

Table 6: Independent sample test for motivational force by award

For the mean score comparison of motivational force for recognition, the result from “equal variances assumed” was used because Levene’s test for equality of variance was high (0.275, much greater than 0.05). The 2-tailed significance level was 0.126 (much higher than 0.05) and the 95% confidence interval of the difference (between -1.056 and 0.131). Therefore, there was no difference between the male and female motivational forces for getting recognition (significance level of 0.05) (see Table 7).

| | Levene's test for equality of variances | | t-test for equality of means | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|------------|------------------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|------------|
| | F | sig. | t | df | sig. (2-tailed) | Mean difference | Std. error difference | 95% confidence interval of the difference | |
| | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Equal variances assumed | 1.19 | .28 | -1.54 | 190 | .13 | -.46 | .30 | -1.06 | .13 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | -1.54 | 189.82 | .13 | -.46 | .30 | -1.05 | .13 |

Table 7: Independent sample test for motivational force by recognition of managers

Implications and conclusions

This research suggests that the student participants did not have high levels of motivation in their working environments. The students were not highly motivated throughout their industry experience, and that level of motivation remained low. From the expectancy theory, two different approaches were tested. The first result found weak motivational elements among the students and that the levels of motivation were also weak. The second test, related to the calculation of motivational forces, revealed that there was a middle range of motivational force for wage, award and recognition among the students.

It was discovered that:

- 1) The students believed that their good service would lead to guest compliments, but their good service did not necessarily lead to this being recognised by their managers.

- 2) The majority of students had a positive score of motivational force for wage, award and recognition, but because the scores were average, the results did not indicate that the students were highly motivated during their industry experience.
- 3) There were no score differences between male and female students in their motivation force for wage, award and recognition.

International students are important to education providers for financial reasons; potential international teaching and research cooperation; and promoting the reputation of the institutions overseas. International students are also useful as resources for the hospitality industry, with different language skills, diverse cultural understanding, and the ability to meet the flexible demands of customers from different countries. Working environment, experience and impressions are the most cited and critical criteria for international students when selecting a country in which to study. Therefore, the importance of international students' work experience and motivation should not be underestimated.

This research can contribute valuable information to human resource managers in the Australian hospitality industry who hire an increasing number of international students. Education institutions should provide students with more realistic practical information about the industrial working environment in the curriculum. This would help reduce the gap between student perceptions and the actual working conditions in the hospitality industry. It is also recommended that the Australian hospitality industry pay more attention to the attributes of international students so that students' motivations are enhanced whilst also gaining work experience.

Although the study tried to avoid any unnecessary bias and limitations, the following boundaries are acknowledged:

- 1) The survey was restricted to the Brisbane and Gold Coast areas in Queensland and therefore it cannot be generalised across Australia.
- 2) Nearly 80% of the respondents had their industry experience in food and beverage departments so other departments of the industry were not sufficiently reflected.
- 3) Almost two-thirds of the respondents had less than 6 months work experience.

Through the research, it was revealed that there was a low level of motivation among international students. However, the reasons for this have not been sufficiently explained. It would be of value to study the reasons for their low levels of motivation in greater depth. It would be useful if a comparative study were conducted between students in the Brisbane area and those studying in other areas in Australia or overseas.

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