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Generation Z and hospitality careers

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Abstract

This article explores youth career decision-making at a time of ongoing concerns surrounding the supply of labour to the hospitality industry. This article is unique in its combination of attitudes of Generation Z with a pre-university-aged sample combined with employer views. A survey of 245 youth provided insights into work values and attitudes towards hospitality careers, which was complemented by interviews with nine hospitality employers. Findings indicate only a small percentage of youth consider hospitality employment an attractive option. However, this insight must be tempered by an acknowledgement of participants' early, exploratory phase of career development, by the fact that other occupations were equally not regarded in particularly high esteem, and the important role capability considerations played in assessing career options. Beyond a focus on personal development, there was little indication of homogeneity regarding work values. Employer interviews supported the notion of an 'ignorance barrier' in relation to youth seeking hospitality employment. The UK hospitality sector is increasingly concerned with addressing the 'image' of the industry as an attractive career choice, and this research underlines the importance of industry working together with education partners to promote the opportunities and address negative perceptions.

Keywords

Generation Z

hospitality careers

hospitality employment

work values

career development

Generation Theory

Introduction

Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000) argued that surveys of attitudes towards tourism employment target three groups: (1) secondary school students, (2) university students and (3) tourism employees. However, where most studies have focused on university/college students, surveys of tourism and hospitality employees and secondary school students are less common. Regarding this latter group, this represents a gap in knowledge because these early years are formative and therefore play an important exploratory function in an individual's career development (Super 1984). The need for further research into how early attitudes towards hospitality are formed was in fact recently highlighted by Williamson who asked:

At a time when there are thousands of new jobs being created in hospitality, why does it remain a 'dummy subject' in schools? Why do so many parents 'get the hint' and hope their kids do anything other than hospitality work? (2017: 203)

An improved understanding of early career decisions and attitudes towards hospitality employment, particularly in relation to Generation Z who have received scarcely any attention in hospitality studies to date (Goh and Lee 2018), is timely. This is particularly true as concerns surrounding skills shortages continue to prevail in the United Kingdom, exacerbated by the result of the 2016 Brexit referendum, but which is something that continues to vex hospitality educators and industry globally (Harkison et al. 2011; Kock and Strydom 2013; Williamson 2017). Numerous studies suggest that, depending on perspective, fewer hospitality students enter the industry upon graduation than might be anticipated although this varies by location (Chang and Tse 2015, Jenkins 2001; Richardson 2009). While reliable data are hard to come by, in the United Kingdom some research indicates that between 58 per cent and 69 per cent of hospitality graduates find work in the sector within six months of graduating (Walmsley 2011).

Because the study of pre-university students' career decision-making with reference to the hospitality sector is largely virgin territory, this article takes an exploratory approach at understanding four interrelated issues: (1) secondary school students' career decision-making status (where they are in relation to making career decisions), (2) their work values (what one seeks to attain through work), (3) attitudes towards careers in tourism and hospitality and (4) the relationship between these issues and employer perspectives. Thus, whereas most studies in hospitality focus on attitudes towards careers in the sector, with some reference also to work values, limited attention has been granted to the setting within which these attitudes and values exist, i.e. career decision-making status. Some appreciation of career decision-making status is, we argue, critical if we are to make sense of the potential impact of these attitudes on actual career decisions.

The article is structured as follows: The literature review discusses each of the four issues highlighted above with a view to providing a broad background in career decision-making

and attitudes towards hospitality sector employment. It is important to reiterate the scoping nature of this study, i.e. the intention is to take a ‘bird’s eye’ perspective rather than focus on any specific theory or theories. We present an overview of the career decision-making landscape as it relates to Generation Z and hospitality careers upon which others may drill down into the finer detail. After presenting the methodology, results of the quantitative aspect of the study are provided before we turn to qualitative data from employers. The study concludes by drawing together key insights and offering implications for researchers and practitioners. To note, we cover literature here that mentions tourism as well as hospitality because it is relevant to our discussion, not least because much of the literature on tourism employment focuses on hospitality (Baum et al. 2016).

Literature review

Youth career development and decision-making

In an increasingly ‘volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world’ (OECD 2018: 3) youth transitions into work have become more complex (Keep 2012; Symonds et al. 2011), justifying an exploration of young people’s career decision-making; here as it relates to hospitality employment specifically. Literature in the area of career decision-making and development extends back at least to Parsons’ (1909) foundational work (Brown 2002).

While it would not be feasible to cover the entirety of the literature in this domain, we draw attention to some key challenges and debates as they relate to this study. Thus, underpinning the importance of early-stage career development, and the notion that careers develop in stages (Levinson et al. 1978), Super’s extensive work in this area (e.g. 1953, 1980, 1990) suggests youth tend to find themselves in an exploration phase. Their career development tasks are about gaining access to information on different occupations and their suitability for these occupations (see also Gottfredson 2002).

An ongoing debate in the career decision-making and development literature relates to the role of rationality (see e.g. Gati et al. 1996) and normative vs descriptive theories of career decision-making (Gati 1990). While much prescriptive theory draws on assumptions of rational decision-making whereby an individual considers attributes associated with the options available and then assigns a weighting based on importance of each criterion (see e.g. Gati et al. 1996; Walmsley et al. 2012), actual decision-making may be far from rational and more intuitive. Thus, Doyle (2003: 336) acknowledges: ‘The sad fact is that our earliest, often least-considered decisions can determine the rest of our lives, and each generation has to learn this anew’ thereby highlighting not just the bounded rationality (Simon 1981: n.pag.) underpinning career choices, but also their implications.

Turning to work values, it is recognized that values generally may be investigated in various aspects of life including work (Jin and Rounds 2012). Work values have been defined as ‘an objective, either a psychological state, a relationship, or material condition, that one seeks to attain’ (Super 1980: 130), a definition broadly adopted also by Schwartz who offers ‘the goals or rewards people seek through their work’ (1999: 43). Work values are included here because they are assumed via the notion of occupational interests to influence career decisions in a matching process (Gottfredson 1985, 2002), i.e. an individual seeks to first circumscribe different occupations based on their interests, and then reach a compromise between desirable and achievable career options based on their own abilities.

There has been a recent ‘explosion’ of literature on the work values of different generations (Lyons and Kuron 2014: 139). Increasingly, research is focusing on Generation Z, also referred to as The Change Generation (Lovell Corporation 2017), or Post-Millennials, the iGeneration, Founders or Plurals (Beall 2016). This is commonly regarded as the generation born in the mid-1990s and thus who have recently started to enter the labour market. There is no agreement as to Generation Z’s work values (Lyons and Kuron 2014). For example, some

studies indicate the importance of work's purpose (Lovell Corporation 2017), some the primacy of job security (Maurer 2016), others a proclivity for entrepreneurship (Beall 2016; Kubátová 2016). Other studies explore perceptions of youth amongst older generations such as Foster (2013). Goh and Lee (2018) summarize some of the literature in this area whereby an overlap between Generation Z and Generation Y can occur (e.g. Deloitte [2017] point to a transactional approach to employment for Generation Z, which was similarly identified for Generation Y by Twenge et al. [2010]).

Despite the currency of Generation Theory to help explain work values, the validity of Generation Theory may be questioned in principle, or at least queried in relation to its use. Thus, Leuty and Hansen (2014) warn of confusing the supposed effect of belonging to a certain generation on work values with the effects of ageing. There is also an assumption underpinning Generation Theory that a generation's most enduring beliefs are shaped in childhood/youth (Mannheim 1952). Finally, in relation to the practical implications of Generation Theory the hospitality manager risks falling into the ecological fallacy trap, i.e. treating an individual based on cohort characteristics (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997). Despite its appeal, Generation Theory is not without its critics.

With reference to the career decision-making literature in hospitality, hospitality students' career decision-making features regularly. Common themes include attitudes and expectations towards industry employment (Aksu and Köksal 2005; Blomme et al. 2009; Harkison et al. 2011; Kim et al. 2010; Richardson 2009; Roney and Oztin 2007; World Travel and Tourism Council 2013), the impact of work experiences on career decisions (Barron 2007; Kuslivan et al. 2003; Mooney and Jameson 2018; Walmsley et al. 2012), the impact of education on career decisions (Walmsley and Thomas 2009) or more commonly still graduates' preparedness for employment (Connolly and McGing 2006; Harkison et al. 2011; Kock and Strydom 2013). What is absent from this literature are the opinions of youth

in secondary education. There is a very clear empirical gap here, exacerbated by the insight (e.g. Arnold 1997) that early work experiences and educational trajectories shape subsequent career development. Thus, while it is important to understand attitudes towards hospitality employment from the perspective of hospitality students and graduates (in HE), by focusing solely on hospitality students (in HE) we are ignoring a huge proportion of future hospitality sector employees.

To be able to offer the basis of a comparison with our data, we propose a number of key reasons offered by the literature as to why individuals decide to study hospitality. Two recent studies are particularly instructive in this regard. First, Goh et al. (2017) use Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour to explore decisions for selecting a private hotel management school of a cohort of students in Australia. Here ten key attitudes, four social groups and four perceived difficulties were elicited. Within the context of our study, of note are the practical orientation of hospitality programmes, allied to this the opportunity of taking an industry placement, the opportunity to engage with customers/guests and fair wages. The fact that social norms were also included illustrates that career decisions are not taken in a vacuum. Frawley et al.'s (2019) study is mentioned because it demonstrates the multitude of factors that influence career decision-making of hospitality students, including not solely industry-related factors but also family background and affordability, for example.

A major theme in studies of students and recent graduates in hospitality is that of attitudes towards employment in the sector. Frequently the reason for this interest is a concern that those studying hospitality then turn away from it before, or soon after, graduation given negative attitudes (Josiam et al. 2010; Kim et al. 2010; Mooney and Jameson 2018; Richardson 2009). There may be justification for this concern on the part of employers where skills shortages exist, with some studies suggesting a sizeable proportion of hospitality students do not in fact join the hospitality sector workforce upon graduation (McKercher et

al. 1995; O’Leary and Deegan 2005). Whether this is down to negative attitudes towards the sector is less clear, although educators (Jenkins 2001; Kock and Strydom 2013) and industry (World Travel and Tourism Council 2013) believe negative attitudes play an important role in detaching youth from hospitality sector work.

Common themes in relation to negative attitudes of university students towards hospitality employment involve low pay (e.g. Aksu and Köksal 2005; Barron 2007; Wan et al. 2014) and lack of career development opportunities (e.g. Chuang et al. 2007; Hjalager and Andersen 2000; Peters 2005; Richardson and Butler 2012). Paradoxically, hospitality is frequently promoted on the grounds that career progression is swifter than in many industries (e.g. Chuang and Dellmann-Jenkins 2010; Ladkin 2002). An important consideration here is a number of studies have demonstrated that university students’ attitudes do not necessarily relate to the sector as a whole, but to certain job roles or sub-sectors within it (Airey and Frontistis 1997; Chuang et al. 2007; Jenkins 2001; Robinson et al. 2016).

Employer perspectives

Hospitality businesses across the United Kingdom are widely recognized as facing recruitment and retention challenges in the volume, availability and quality of talent supply. Nationally (in the United Kingdom), the growth of the hospitality sector is expected to continue, with an additional 993,000 staff needed by 2022 (People 1st 2015). This shortage is likely to become even more critical in light of Brexit whereby the British Hospitality Association (BHA) has predicted that Brexit could result in a recruitment gap of over one million workers by 2029 (KPMG 2017). The same report (KPMG 2017) notes that while investment is needed in skills, training and the promotion of the industry, it is increasingly difficult for businesses to cover recruitment and training costs while operating on tight profit margins.

The issue surrounding labour shortages relates not solely to number of people available, but also to skills gaps. Thus, a mismatch between what employers say they require from hospitality graduates and the skills these graduates bring with them to the workplace is a well-trodden path in the hospitality literature (People 1st 2013; Richardson and Butler 2012; Wang and Tsai 2014). To further complicate matters, some studies suggest hospitality employers are less concerned with skills but more with the ‘right attitude’ (Harkison et al. 2011). Moreover, debates continue surrounding the purpose of hospitality higher education, which commonly orientate themselves around a vocational–academic divide (Lashley et al. 2007; Tribe 2002; Morrison and O’Gorman 2008).

Actions recommended in the KPMG (2017) report to tackle the mismatch between labour demand and supply in the hospitality sector include: promotion of employment in the hospitality sector on a national scale, investment in education/skills needed by the industry and investment in soft skills education in schools to increase work readiness. The barriers to the greater uptake of hospitality employment relate therefore to image and awareness, and, once in employment, to skills gaps. The common concerns surrounding youth attitudes towards the sector (as outlined above), and a mismatch of expectations with regard to ‘work readiness’ (Harkison et al. 2011; Millar et al. 2010; Raybould and Wilkins 2005) continue to preoccupy hospitality employers.

To summarize, we began the literature review by outlining briefly, given the broad scope of the study, some key debates in the career development and decision-making literature that will help us make sense of the study’s findings. Then we outlined how a body of literature has accumulated on attitudes of university students towards hospitality employment, with some emphasis on negative attitudes developed through study and work experience in the sector. We have also recognized the extremely limited study of Generation Z’s attitudes towards hospitality employment, and where this has occurred (e.g. Goh and Lee 2018), the

continued focus on using samples of university students studying hospitality. Finally, the literature review identified a concern on the part of employers regarding skills shortages and skills gaps in the labour market, partly as a result of perceived negative attitudes of youth towards hospitality employment.

Methodology

Data in this study are derived from two sources: a survey of secondary school students (aged 14–17) and interviews with industry representatives. Regarding the survey, this was developed and distributed in partnership with The Springboard Charity, which helps young people achieve their potential and nurtures unemployed people of any age into work.

Working with an industry partner who understandably had their own data needs, meant as a team the researchers in this study also had to compromise with regard to the form and nature of data collected. We developed the survey around three main themes as presented in the survey-related part of our article: career decision-making status, work values and attitudes towards hospitality employment. The decision to focus on these three elements was largely determined by the research team, although some response options (e.g. comparison occupations) were largely provided by the industry partner.

In autumn 2015, 50 paper surveys were received from The Springboard Charity (these were from a school in Scotland). Of these, 48 surveys were usable. The majority of responses featured in this survey were completed online, again with the assistance of The Springboard Charity. A further 263 surveys were received from a school in Cornwall (southwest of the United Kingdom), of which 181 were useable, and 27 from a school in Kent (southeast of the United Kingdom), of which fifteen were useable. In total, therefore, 245 useable surveys from three geographical regions in the United Kingdom were received. Survey data were analysed primarily using descriptive statistics (comparing means, measures of dispersion and

frequency distributions). Because we had not set up a model to test, and mainly were not drawing on established measurement scales, there was limited scope to apply more advanced, stochastic statistical techniques.

Although the bulk of the data for this study were derived from potential future hospitality workers, to offer an insight also from the demand-side (i.e. industry), in-depth interviews were conducted with hospitality businesses in the Windsor area (as part of a broader initiative to tackle youth transitions into hospitality employment). The interviews followed a semi-structured approach, focused around identifying employer perceptions of young people seeking recruitment and to map out the potential career paths and benefits of working in this sector. Access to research participants was supported by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. Nine interviews were secured with mid to senior management within a diverse sample including boutique country house hotels, major mid-range UK chains and a theme park hotel. We do not claim these businesses are necessarily representative of the hospitality sector, as sampling was a combination of purpose and convenience (willingness and availability to participate) (Saunders et al. 2016). However, their views have been included here as we were able to speak to human resources directors/managers, thus lending authoritative insights into the issue of youth employment in the sector.

The interviews were recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed through primarily a deductive coding approach, with some elements of inductive coding also (Seale 2004). Deductive themes were identified through reference to the semi-structured interview guide, which was structured around opportunities and challenges for youth employment within each business, and recruitment and retention challenges experienced in terms of technical and soft skills. Quotations are presented to illustrate a point being made. Given the small sample of interview participants we were not looking here to generalize statistically, but to get a flavour

of hospitality sector views in relation to recruitment challenges as they relate to youth, and then to compare these to the survey results.

Results

The mean age of survey respondents was 15.08 years with an age range of 14–17 years. A disproportionate number of males completed the survey (55.5% male against 45.5% female). In the UK population, the proportion of males aged 14–17 is approximately 51.3% (own calculation based on Office for National Statistics [2016] data); 85.3% of respondents were white British with 3.4% selecting the ‘Other White’ option. This is broadly aligned with 2011 Census data where 80.5% of the population of England and Wales classified themselves as ‘White British’ and 4.4% as ‘Other White’ (Office for National Statistics 2018). On the basis of gender and ethnicity distributions, we are fairly confident our sample is broadly representative of the population of 14–17 year olds in the United Kingdom.

Career decision-making status

A four-item career decidedness scale sought to measure the extent to which individuals knew what they wanted to do after school and level of concern about their career development (Cronbach alpha: 0.67 interpreted here as acceptable) (Bland and Altman 1997). This was done to set the data in context (e.g., the salience of attitudes in decision-making depends on the nature and context of the decisions that are being made) (Eagly and Chaiken 1993). The mean score on the career decidedness scale was 5.68 ($s = 2.09$) indicating a slight tendency towards being more rather than less career decided, although the score is not an indication of a high level of career decidedness. In fact, what is confirmed visually by the frequency distribution (histogram) relating to ‘career decidedness’ and the measures of skewness (0.126) and kurtosis (−0.6), data are approximately normally distributed. Thus, an almost equal number of respondents are as undecided about their careers as are decided.

A further question sought to understand the extent to which respondents felt they understood the career/job opportunities available to them in the hospitality sector. Alongside ‘hospitality, leisure and tourism’ other sectors were included to offer a more robust appreciation, specifically a relative appreciation, of respondents’ stated understanding of employment opportunities. Again, the focus here is on a contextual understanding of the relationship between hospitality and career decision-making. The other sectors that were included are ‘finance’, ‘energy’, ‘life sciences’ (e.g. human health and social work) and ‘creative industries’ (e.g. arts and entertainment). Results indicated a limited understanding of career opportunities in hospitality and tourism (mean = 2.3 on a five-point scale whereby 1 = not at all familiar and 5 = extremely familiar), with very similar scores recorded for ‘finance’ and ‘energy’ (2.32). Scores for the two other sectors/areas were somewhat higher (life sciences = 2.64; creative industries = 2.8).

Work values

Objective two sought to understand what respondents would look for in their chosen job/career, in other words insights into their work values. Results are displayed in Table 1, ranked by importance (seven-point scale where 1 = ‘not important at all’ and 7 = ‘extremely important’).

Table 1: Work values.

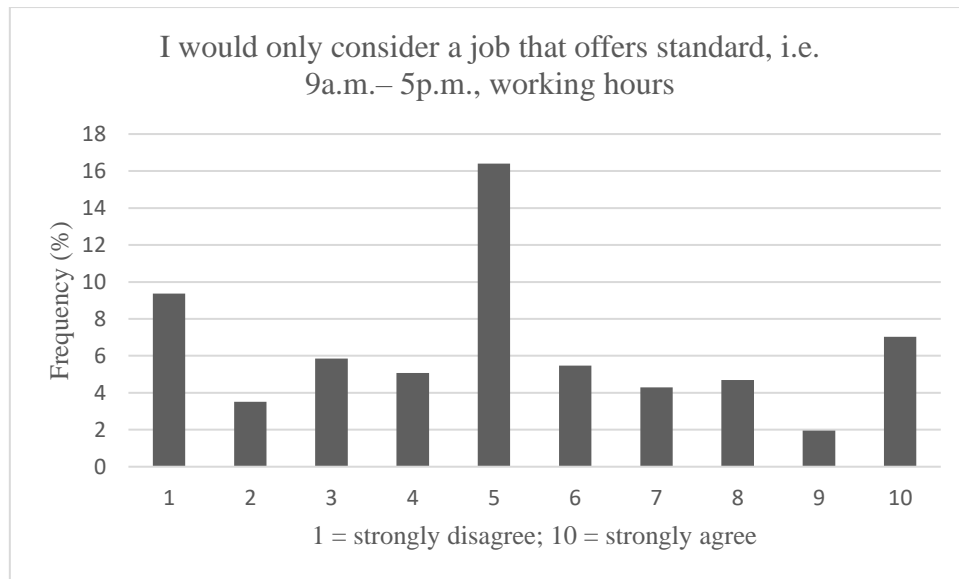
	\bar{x}	<i>s</i>
Chance to learn new skills	5.18	1.412
Interests and challenges the mind	4.96	1.365
Job security	4.87	1.562
Working for the good of others	4.87	1.364
Variety in the work	4.87	1.330

Good performance rewarded	4.82	1.421
Feeling of achievement	4.78	1.577
Left to make own decisions	4.50	1.328
Regular routine	4.32	1.507
Working alone	3.85	1.643

We can see that all items were of some relevance to participants, with the intellectual components of the job (learning and challenging the mind) scoring highest. It should be noted that the responses were quite varied however, particularly where the mean is low (e.g. ‘working alone’ and ‘regular routine’). As for previous questions, the sample overall is quite divided on issues relating to career decision-making and work values. This supports the exploratory nature of career development of youth (Super 1984).

We also sought to understand youth attitudes to typical characteristics of hospitality employment. Specifically, four statements were presented, to which respondents could agree or disagree with, relating to standard vs non-standard working patterns (e.g. working weekends, having set hours, willingness to work shifts; 1–10 scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 10 = strongly agree). Again, judged on the mean (all four scores ranged between 5.03 and 5.20) respondents were not concerned either way about standard vs non-standard hours. However, the distribution of responses was telling in that a great deal of variation was discernible (to illustrate, we present responses to one of the questions in Figure 1). The distribution for the other three items was very similar. What we notice is that many are not swayed either way (those scoring 5–6), but with an almost even distribution of the remaining respondents on either side of the scale.

Figure 1: Work values and working hours.



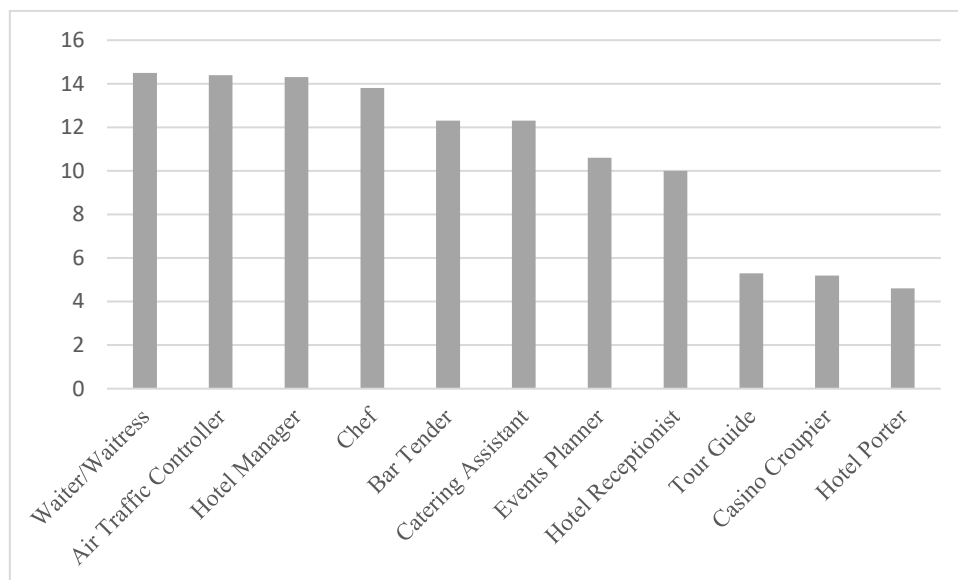
Attitudes to tourism and hospitality employment

Based on objective three, we now turn explicitly to attitudes towards hospitality employment. We asked respondents to rate 26 occupations, including eleven in hospitality, by the extent to which they believed society held them in esteem (wording in the questionnaire was ‘respected’). The highest ranked hospitality occupation was hotel manager with a mean score of 3.22 (medium–high status) behind architects, police officers, fire fighters and solicitors but ahead of accountants, teachers and newspaper reporters. The second-highest ranked hospitality job was that of chef (3.17), closely followed by air traffic controllers (2.99). Other hospitality/tourism occupations scored low–medium on the recognition scale (events planner, 2.91; waiter/waitress, 2.61; bar tender, 2.51; casino croupier, 2.50; hotel porter, 2.45; hotel receptionist, 2.42; tour guide, 2.41; catering assistant, 2.38).

Respondents were then asked to what extent they felt the same 26 occupations offered ‘a suitable and realistic choice for your future career?’ (five-point scale, 1=not at all suitable or realistic; 5 = entirely suitable and realistic). We draw in this question on Gottfredson’s (1985) Theory of the Development of Occupational Aspirations which describes a process of

circumscribing desirable occupations followed by a process of compromise based on individual abilities, and also Lent et al.'s (1994) Social Cognitive Career Theory where feasibility of career choice plays an important role. Here, the highest scoring hospitality occupation was 'chef' (2.3; ninth place out of 26), very closely followed by 'hotel manager' (2.29). The lowest scoring hospitality occupation was 'hotel porter' (1.74; the lowest ranked occupation overall too). Overall, none of the hospitality/tourism occupations were regarded as suitable as well as realistic judged by the mean score alone. Rather than relying solely on the mean therefore, Figure 2 provides the percentage of respondents who regarded the eleven hospitality/tourism occupations as either 'entirely suitable and realistic' or 'suitable and realistic', anyone who could, in other words, envisage working in the hospitality sector. Here we see that a small but not insignificant minority regard hospitality work as suitable and realistic.

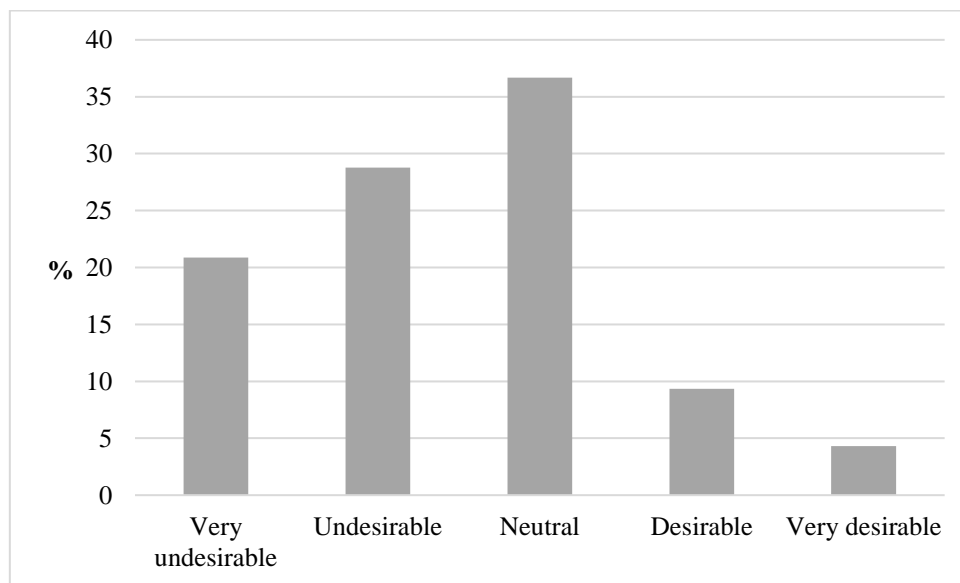
Figure 2: Suitable and realistic occupations in hospitality (% of respondents).



We also sought to understand how appealing hospitality, tourism and leisure were as a future career option. Figure 3 illustrates the extent of the sector's (lack of) appeal. It should be noted

however that the appeal of careers in both ‘energy’ and ‘finance’ is similarly low, whereas ‘life sciences’ and ‘creative industries’ have greater appeal. This mirrors the results with regard to amount of knowledge participants had of the different sectors (see also previous section).

Figure 3: Thinking about your future job/career, how appealing is ‘hospitality, tourism and leisure’?



We were interested in establishing the extent to which prior work experience impacted attitudes towards future careers in hospitality and tourism. The first step was to establish the extent to which respondents had worked in hospitality, tourism or leisure (HTL). Given the age of respondents, we might consider the following figures quite high although it has been recognized previously that tourism and hospitality lend themselves to youth employment (e.g. Lashley 2005; Walmsley 2015): hospitality = 30.5% prior work experience, tourism = 7.6% and leisure = 9.9%. In terms of how this work experience affected attitudes towards working in tourism, hospitality and leisure we received 48 responses. The good news here, at least for those who are concerned about labour supply shortages to the sector, is that more respondents

suggested it had increased their intention or at least awakened an interest to pursue a career in HTL than had turned them away from the sector (39.6% vs 12.5%).

As the influence of family members on career decisions in the career development literature is well established (e.g. Whiston and Keller 2004), we also sought to understand how having a close family member in hospitality/tourism/leisure impacted attitudes towards working in either of these sectors. Again, in what may be seen as of some reassurance to tourism/hospitality employers, a far higher proportion of respondents said having a family member working in the sector definitely encouraged them to seek employment in the sector than the opposite (17% vs 3.8%). Furthermore, while only 1.9% suggested it had put them off seeking hospitality employment, 30.2% claimed it had led them to think of seeking a career in the hospitality sector.

Employer perspectives

The main thrust of the employer interviews was to explore their perceptions of barriers to youth employment in the sector, and what might be done to improve the transition of youth (Generation Z) into hospitality work. The results of the interviews have been included here as employment results from a matching of labour demand and supply; consequently, a focus only on one side of the employment equation will always be limiting in explaining the uptake of hospitality work. These responses are indicative in nature, although the results demonstrate a detailed awareness of issues surrounding potential barriers, as well as conduits, to youth employment as one would expect from a sample of senior industry representatives.

The benefits of hospitality employment in terms of flexibility of working hours, opportunities for learning and career development, workplace environment and non-financial benefits were described by participants. To an extent, the view that non-standard working hours might

appeal to some youth reflects the findings of the survey. The issue of non-standard working hours was not perceived as a major barrier for hospitality employment by employers.

A further alignment with survey results is employers' emphasis on opportunities for skills development in the sector, where the survey indicated the importance of intellectual variety as a work value. Employers also mentioned the opportunity to work across departments and the 'the rich variety of a working day' as differing guests pass through the hotel:

There are such a variety of positions available across different teams. People often don't realise until they are here how many events we hold such as team building days, weddings, parties and other big functions. For example we have had 'Harry Potter' style or Total Wipeout' events, which make really fun days to be at work. For the right people with the right attitude, it is a satisfying and rewarding career. You are always occupied, so time goes fast. (HR manager – country house hotel)

There was a recognition of low entry-level wages that are putting some youth off applying to work in the sector. This, alongside a lack of promoting the sector's positive aspects, certainly appears to be key to attracting Generation Z according to participants as illustrated in the following quotation:

The biggest issue is we don't pay enough money at entry level. I have been carrying out some wage analysis and compared to other sectors, we need to have an overall increase. This means we need to be realistic about who we are going to attract as why would they come here when they can earn more at KFC? But once they are in, staff

turnover is very low, they have a fruitful experience of work – they see the training they receive, the nice uniform, the discounts, and the good team of people they are working with. (general manager – urban upmarket hotel)

The participants interviewed in this study largely indicated that higher education qualifications are not perceived to be important in career development, and practical experience (from candidates with the right attitude) is often held in equally high esteem. However, it was also noted that higher education provides the desirable skills and expertise required to progress towards managerial levels, and without qualifications, employees can become ‘stuck’ at mid-management level. Graduate expectations of employment need to be managed in terms of accepting that entry-level positions may be low, but with the right attitude, they can progress quickly.

A final consideration from employer interviews revolved around the value of work experience. Employers felt that close collaboration with education providers is key to ensuring the benefits of work experience are maximized. Employers felt that providing positive work experience alongside positive messages from education providers was the best way to address skills shortages:

People don't realise what opportunities are available, and really understand a hotel environment with its many different areas. It could help spread awareness if we got parents into the business and showed them around. (HR manager – premium chain hotel)

There is also a recognition here that the views of peers and close relatives (parents) play a part in shaping career decisions. Thus, both work experience and attitudes of significant others may shape career decisions as also demonstrated in the survey findings.

Discussion

One of the key results of this study of Generation Z is that while some have a clear understanding of what their occupational choices are, many do not (see the notion of career decidedness above). This observation aligns with career development theory (e.g. Super 1984) in that youth are still in the exploration and crystallization phases of career development. Therefore, these results do not come as a surprise, but are important in terms of their implications for much of the literature on attitudes towards tourism and hospitality employment. This is because they question the robustness and importance of these attitudes in the career decision-making process, hitherto something largely assumed, despite the general issue (fluid role of attitudes in decision-making) having been recognized some time ago (e.g. Eagly and Chaiken 1993). Importantly then, while respondents displayed a limited understanding of employment opportunities in the hospitality sector this also holds for work in other sectors. We refer again to Doyle's (2003) contention that early career decisions are frequently the least considered despite their long-term implications for the individual. We would add that not only are they not necessarily considered, accurate information itself is frequently lacking. Furthermore, while career decisions may not be completely haphazard or irrational, we need to distinguish between normative and descriptive career decision-making, recognizing that when it comes to 'choices for or against hospitality' these are never made in a vacuum. For example, the influence of family and significant others was demonstrated by the survey, recognized also by Williamson (2017) in relation to hospitality career choices, and very practical considerations (living costs) by the interviews with industry experts.

With regard to Generation Z's work values, respondents indicated a preference for intellectual and learning goals; opportunity for personal development was regarded as important. This aligns with findings from Goh and Lee's (2018) study. Again, this might be anticipated given their stage of career development. Job security scored fairly highly which accords with Maurer's (2016) study. It cannot be ignored however, and this is something that applies to many of the variables explored in this study, a great deal of variation in responses exists. This has implications for the ontological status of Generation Z's work values, specifically whether we can reliably identify a set of work values that apply across an entire generation. The literature review highlighted a number of concerns relating to Generation Theory and a recent German study of over 76,000 individuals (Schröder 2018) was scarcely able to identify any differences between Generations X and Y, drawing some quite problematic conclusions for the wealth of management literature that recommends treating generation cohorts differently. It is of course tempting to 'jump on the bandwagon' of Generation Theory, and yet results here are anything but clear in identifying a common set of work values.

In recognition of a number of other studies that explore attitudes towards hospitality employment at an occupational level (Airey and Frontistis 1997; Chuang et al. 2007; Jenkins 2001; Robinson et al. 2016) this approach was also adopted here. Results indicated that although different jobs within the hospitality sector were not generally held in high esteem, the same can be said about many of the other occupational roles provided by way of comparison. Setting attitudes towards hospitality employment relative to employment (occupations) in other sectors does not commonly occur, but is helpful in making sense of these attitudes. Decision-making is about evaluating between different alternatives (Eilon 1969); focusing only on one of the options (i.e. hospitality) does not therefore present a robust means of assessing occupational choices. In fact, occupational decisions take into

account not just other occupations but assessment of one's own ability to perform in these occupations (Gottfredson 2002; Lent et al. 1994). Thus, including not just preferences but perceptions of suitability made a difference to the ranking of hospitality occupations where 'waiter/waitress' jumped to first place next to 'air traffic controller', 'hotel manager' and 'chef'.

Overall, only a small proportion of students found hospitality employment (understood generically) desirable or very desirable although many respondents were neutral towards hospitality employment, and other sectors fared similarly in terms of appeal. Both having prior work experience in the sector and having a close family member with work experience in the sector had a positive effect on attitudes towards employment in the sector, something also confirmed by Goh and Lee (2018). This should be welcomed by hospitality employers where some other sources (Barron and Maxwell 1993; Getz 1994; Kusluvan and Kusluvan 2000) indicate work experience, especially as part of a university programme, can have the opposite effect.

Industry's positive perceptions, often turning apparent negative aspects of work such as unsociable hours into something positive (e.g. being able to access amenities in quieter periods) mirrors another recent study (Walmsley et al. 2018) that likewise sought to understand hospitality employer perceptions of work in the sector. Based on the results of the survey, the employer's notion of awareness-raising is likely to be just as important as tackling negative attitudes towards hospitality employment. Despite employers highlighting, as we might expect, positive aspects to hospitality work, there was an acknowledgement of low pay for entry-level jobs. This, it was argued, could be detracting potential employees from work in the sector, a sector they might have otherwise thrived in.

Conclusion

The starting point for this study were ongoing concerns surrounding a mismatch, current as well as anticipated, between the supply and demand for labour in the hospitality sector in the United Kingdom (Harkison et al. 2011; People 1st 2015; Skirmuntt 2017). Within this context it was recognized that very limited research exists on the next generation of hospitality employees, specifically Generation Z (Goh and Lee 2018; Walmsley 2017), and even less that draws on data from those of school-age (here 14–17 year olds). Indeed, most studies of career decision-making in the hospitality literature focus on university students or recent graduates who had, by their choice of programme demonstrated some commitment to the sector. Moreover, this study has taken a step back to offer a broader view of attitudinal barriers to hospitality employment. While it still sought to understand attitudinal components to career decision-making, it set these within a broader career developmental context. Consequently, the study has provided data on career decision-making, work values and attitudes towards careers in hospitality of a sample of Generation Z youth, to our knowledge the only sample to draw on this age profile to date, combined with data on hospitality employers' perception of barriers to youth employment.

With regard to career decision-making, the study demonstrated some variation though generally not a high degree of career decidedness. This finding is to be expected where career development theory indicates youth is a time for career exploration (e.g. Super 1984). Thus, while the majority of respondents were concerned about their careers, few clear career decisions had been made. This is supported by the findings that not only were employment opportunities in the hospitality sector not fully understood, the same can be said of employment opportunities in other sectors.

Findings also demonstrated a great deal of interest in opportunities for personal development. Beyond an interest in personal development it was difficult to detect overriding work values for this sample of Generation Z youth. In this sense, the study's findings contrast with those

of Goh and Lee (2018) where a greater degree of uniformity in relation to work values was suggested, albeit unsurprisingly given the homogeneous nature of the sample (Australian hospitality students). The extent of variation in responses when it came to work values questions the status of homogeneity of work values as they apply across generations (Schröder 2018). It should be acknowledged though that, given their young age, this cohort was still in the process of developing their (work) values.

Drawing on theories of career development and decision-making, given the level of career indecision, as well as the developmental stage of career development, the role of attitudes, whether positive or negative, may be seen as important but not critical to occupational choices. Overall respondents did not express a great deal of appetite for hospitality sector employment, whether hospitality was regarded as a sector or as separate occupations. That being said, a small minority regarded hospitality employment favourably, with attitudes being improved rather than worsened by work experience in the sector.

A final point to note in relation to attitudes towards employment in the sector is that attitudes towards different occupations in the hospitality sector vary, and while this may not be too surprising, drawing on Gottfredson's (2002) developmental theory of occupational aspirations, as well as Lent et al.'s (1994) Social Cognitive Career Theory, the data indicated that students' career decisions will be shaped not just by attitudes towards individual occupations, but also by perceptions of their own ability/feasibility to meet the requirements of those occupations. Again, this aspect has, to our knowledge, received scant attention in the hospitality literature.

Employers recognized the role negative attitudes of hospitality work may play on recruitment of youth, but felt that the advantages of sector employment were not understood by potential applicants. Awareness of employment opportunities played a greater role as a barrier to youth

employment in the sector rather than negative attitudes. Low entry-level pay was seen as the main problem for attracting youth. This is particularly pertinent in areas where high local living costs (such as London) and a lack of affordable transport links act as a barrier to employment. This point is important because, again, it highlights career decisions will rely on a number of factors, not just individual work values and attitudes towards different occupations. There is an element of necessity that can creep into career decisions, such that more desirable work, that however pays less, is turned down.

Limitations and future research

As with any study that draws on relatively small, non-random samples there is an issue surrounding generalizability of findings. While we cannot say with any degree of certainty that our youth sample is entirely representative, compared to key demographic data there are grounds to believe that we have captured a typical sample of 14–17-year-old youth in the United Kingdom. The fact that many of the variables displayed a high degree of variation goes some way also in allaying fears that the sample is too homogenous because it was drawn from, for example, just one school or one region. Nonetheless, we would recommend that further research be undertaken to compare findings here with those in other areas, ideally with larger samples.

We also acknowledge as potential limitations the broad scope of the study and the danger of self-report bias. Regarding the latter, because the questionnaires were self-completed and anonymous, we believe we have addressed this, as far as is possible, within the confines of the study. Also, in contrast to most studies on young people's attitudes towards hospitality sector employment that take place in settings where attitudes towards hospitality can hardly be regarded as neutral (i.e. on hospitality programmes in higher education), there is less of a pressure to provide socially desirable responses here in a school setting. Regarding the

study's scope, we do not test or apply a specific theory and the data do not lend themselves to advanced statistical analysis. Collaboration with the industry partner set some limitations on the design of the survey. This, however, was a price worth paying in our view given the access to data it provided and does not weaken our results in their function of establishing a baseline of data upon which others can build. Thus, we do provide the much-needed empirical evidence on an under-researched phenomenon. Here we recommend further research, also a more robust comparison between Generations Z and Y using established measures, as well interpretive studies drawing on Goh and Lee's (2018) work. Alongside this there should be a readiness to query the applicability of Generation Theory itself.

In terms of recommendations, the combined analysis of data from youth and industry indicates clear priority areas for both to include increasing awareness of the opportunities within the sector, and informed understanding of what the modern-day sector provides. It is necessary for education providers, including schools not just universities, to continue to work closely with industry partners to expose students to career opportunities and benefits, and to manage expectations. Here we would emphasize Mooney and Jameson's point about inculcating a sense of 'hospitality as calling' (2018: n.pag.) in prospective hospitality employees. Satisfying careers exist in the hospitality sector; we would suggest their profile needs to be raised if the sector is to benefit from the talent coming out of schools, as well as universities. Increased engagement through, for example, mentoring programmes, work experience/placements, guest lectures, events, mock interviews will ideally lead to a continuing dialogue that shapes and guides curriculum development in the first instance, but also provide a more realistic understanding of employment opportunities in the hospitality sector.

Finally, we call for those interested in hospitality employment, specifically early career development in the sector, to take a step back from a focus solely on hospitality students.

While we certainly need studies on hospitality students, influences on career development occur before entering higher education (Arnold 1997; Super 1984), and indeed, most people (still) do not enter higher education. Any claims as to meeting the hospitality sector's needs for workers is biased by default if it only regards those who attended hospitality programmes at university, thereby already displaying some predilection for hospitality employment.

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