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## Identifying Training Challenges in Hospitality Industry: An Exploratory Approach

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# Identifying Training Challenges in Hospitality Industry: An Exploratory Approach

## **Abstract**

The current study investigated the effects of job satisfaction and organizational commitment on organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intentions. The study also examined the effect of organizational citizenship behavior on turnover intentions. Frontline employees working in five-star hotels in North Cyprus were selected as a sample. The result of multiple regression analyses revealed that job satisfaction is positively related to organizational citizenship behavior and negatively related to turnover intentions. Affective organizational commitment was found to be positively related to organizational citizenship behavior. However, the study found no significant relationship between organizational commitment and turnover intentions. Furthermore, organizational citizenship behavior was negatively associated with turnover intentions. The study provides discussion and avenues for future research.

## **Keywords**

job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, turnover intentions, North Cyprus, hospitality industry

# Identifying Training Challenges in the Hospitality Industry: An Exploratory Approach

By Valentini Kalargyrou, Robert H. Woods

## Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine training professionals' insights and beliefs about the challenges they face in training and the corresponding coping mechanisms by analyzing the opinions of training experts. A qualitative implicit method, the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique, which performs interviews using pictures, was conducted with ten training professionals. Metaphors were widely used, and links between concepts were identified. The training challenges that resulted from the current study included measurement, deadlines, frustration, and keeping current. The study took place in Las Vegas, Nevada, and the interviewees were employed by large hotel-casino corporations. Future studies need to research different sized hospitality institutions and different tourist destinations. Current and future training professionals can use the outcome of the study as a guide to better understanding training challenges and to acquiring the corresponding competencies to be more effective in training. Moreover, the outcome of the paper can be beneficial to industry employees and educators, since training and teaching are in many ways similar.

## Introduction

Eric Hoffer, an American writer and philosopher, noted that “in a time of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned find themselves equipped to live only in a world that no longer exists” (Presidential Medal of Freedom, n.d.). Naisbitt (1985) apparently agreed, writing, “In a world that is constantly changing, there is no one subject or set of subjects that will serve you for the foreseeable future, let alone for the rest of your life . . . the most important skill to learn now is learning how to learn.” In other words, in highly competitive environments, such as the hospitality industry, the ability to learn will offer the organization competitive advantage. In recent years, the workplace has become an important learning environment. It is not surprising that in 2007, companies spent \$134.39 billion on employee learning and development. This amount reflects direct learning

expenditures, such as the learning function's staff salaries, administrative learning costs, and non-salary delivery costs, including outsourced activities (American Society for Training and Development, 2009).

Training costs in the hospitality industry can be even more staggering since the highest turnover by far is still in the Accommodation and Food Services sector at 56.4% and the Leisure and Hospitality sector at 52.2%. In 2006, sectors that saw the highest increase in turnover were Accommodation and Food Services, up 7% from the previous year, and Leisure and Hospitality, up 5.4% (Nobsco Corporation, 2006).

Additionally, since high turnover is significantly related to decreased hotel profits (Tracey & Hinkin, 2008), reducing turnover can also be a method for improving profitability (Simons & Hinkin, 2001; Woods & Macaulay, 1989). In addition, others have contended that the amount and quality of training is also directly related to turnover (Berta, 2006). In fact, Mullen (2004) noted that 70% of exiting employees would stay if they were developed and nurtured by their companies. From these studies we can assume that better training may result in lower turnover rates and more profits.

In the hospitality industry the human resources training and development department and the Division Training Managers (DTM) of the departments are responsible for providing and facilitating the learning necessary for employees to meet professional needs. These are the people responsible for teaching organizations how to learn. Therefore, it is necessary to study the training professionals who undertake such a major responsibility within a hospitality organization. The purpose of the study was to examine the insights and beliefs of training professionals about the challenges they face and the corresponding coping mechanisms by analyzing the opinions of training experts.

The facts presented above indicate the importance of training in the hospitality industry, and the main focus is on determining the current challenges of hospitality training professionals by utilizing an implicit qualitative method of data collection called the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET).

ZMET is based, in part, on the fact that most human communication is visual and non-verbal. The ZMET method assumes that people think in pictures that evoke emotions. ZMET findings are also consistent with research showing that people use sensory experience to make decisions and to express abstract ideas. This indicates that sensory images are important media of communication (Olson Zaltman

Associates, 2008). The ZMET technique has been extensively used in marketing. By inviting consumers to use metaphors as they talk about a product or service, ZMET researchers bring consumers' unconscious thoughts and feelings to a level of awareness that allows both parties to explore them more openly together. Metaphors can hide as well as reveal thoughts and feelings (Zaltman, 2003). This attempt is novel in the field of human resources, where the product of training is intangible.

## **Literature Review**

### **Trends in Training**

Good training begins with good selection and recruitment. Recruiters must seek employees who are eager to learn since they will be trained in a new set of competencies, and developed by putting those skills, knowledge, and abilities into practice (O'Halloran, 1991; Sullivan, 2009).

Training is the second biggest line item after marketing on the company's profit-and-loss statement, but it should be viewed as an investment and not an expense. According to Goronkin, "the surefire way to bankruptcy in rough times is to reduce training budgets." Proponents of maintaining training budgets in economic turmoil argue that if the company cuts everything when the economy is bad, it is not prepared when the economy and business improve (Berta, 2001; Berta, 2008).

However, reduced consumer spending has led to training-budget freezes, according to the Council of Hotel and Restaurant Trainers (CHART), a non-profit association of trainers. Seventy-seven percent of CHART members noted that their companies were undergoing budget cutbacks and increased scrutiny about training spending. In addition, 60% said that their training programs have seen cutbacks. For instance, many restaurants are canceling memberships in professional organizations and participation in conferences, and others have not filled empty positions or have eliminated them completely. Hospitality companies are using less expensive training methods, such as Web-based seminars and regional training sessions. The impact of the economic crisis has also made trainers feel more pressure to show results and to link training to increased performance and profitability (Berta, 2008).

### **The Impact of Diversity**

The increase in business globalization is having a strong effect on training and development, in particular on the need for understanding

novel training challenges and forging new sets of training competencies. Culture is very important in the design and implementation of training. Many European and Asian countries place less emphasis on individualism and more on families and social groups. Different cultures also perceive differently the roles of training and training professionals and the appropriate or effective degrees of interaction between trainers and trainees. Trainers must understand the nature of the participants' culture and previous education and training, and adjust their training content, communication, and presentation skills accordingly (Thornhill, 1993).

Fifty years ago, most trainees were male Americans, but today's workplace is much more diverse, with more women and minorities integrated into the workforce. That has resulted in the need to improve communication with employees, support English as a second language (ESL) programs, and translate materials into Spanish (Berta, 2001).

Some challenges arising from the growing diversity have included the power erosion of traditional white male constituents, the diversity of opinions, and a problem stemming from current employees' resentment over the perception that women and minorities lacked necessary qualifications (Joplin & Daus, 1997).

Trainers are now training employees who have different values and customs and who view training techniques differently because of their diverse behaviors, beliefs, customs, traditions, languages, and expressions characteristic to their particular race, ethnicity, or national origin (Society for Human Resource Management, 2011). The trainer starts the session with a "getting to know you" exercise, but workers from diverse ethnical backgrounds might feel uncomfortable asking questions or talking openly about themselves to people they do not know (Wilcox, 1988).

Globally, due to social and economic changes, the number of women participating in the workplace has soared, and gradually an increasing number of women have undertaken more leadership positions. This has created several workplace challenges. For example, sexual harassment training has become an important component in a company's management and, often, non-management training (Lam, 1990).

Nowadays, the increasing diversity in the workplace has created the need for diversity training that aims to increase awareness and understanding of workplace diversity, and to develop concrete skills among staff that will facilitate enhanced productivity and communication among all employees. Diversity training cannot be handled entirely by the

human resources department but rather must be embraced and worked on by the entire organization and, in particular, top leadership (Rice et al., 2006).

### **Role of Training Professionals**

Learning can be viewed as formal and informal. Formal learning is learning through structured classroom settings, and informal learning is learning from experience. Formal trainers are those who design and deliver training programs, and informal trainers are colleagues and supervisors who provide on-the-job training. Forms of informal training include buddy programs and interdepartmental mentoring, by which means employees can ask questions, have lunch with their mentors, and feel comfortable from their first day in the workplace (Higley, 2007; Poell et al., 2006; Terrion, 2006).

Training professionals are an important asset for hospitality operations because they are responsible for providing formal learning to new and existing employees, and oftentimes they become informal trainers by mentoring employees in their department. Training helps employees to be better prepared and more eligible for promotion opportunities. Training professionals are also responsible for the continued development of management, providing the necessary tools for them to grow and develop into leaders. The training professional's role is shifting from being a provider of training to that of a facilitator of learning. Promoting, guiding, enabling, and supporting learning must become the focus of their activities in order to achieve learning organizations that reinvent not just their organization, but also their industry (Hayes & Zaccarelli, 1996).

Trainers are often unique in the hospitality industry because they typically start at the bottom and work their way up to higher positions. They must be able to work with entry-level employees as well as senior management and must be adequately trained to handle the diversity of training needs. Trainers must be able to demonstrate the ability to motivate others through influence, not formal authority, utilizing active listening and effective negotiation techniques; they must be viewed as corporate experts when it comes to training matters and act as champions for the overall training needs (Davey, 2007). Other studies found that technological skills, people skills, creativity, the use of different ways of delivering training, enthusiasm, passion, humor, and self-confidence were important competencies for effective training (Kalargyrou & Woods, 2011; Lalaguna, 2007; Rae, 2002).

Training professionals need to be skilled in the four management functions:

(1) planning, from conducting a needs assessment, to designing a program, to measuring outcomes; (2) organizing the two main components of an organization, structure and people; (3) directing, which encompasses leading, communicating, supervising, and motivating; and (4) controlling, which ensures that the training plan is effectively performed (Cummings, 1984).

Training professionals should consider the different competency levels of different working groups in training. Trainers often deal with four groups of workers: people who do not know what skills are required to do the job, newly hired graduates who know what they need to know but do not know how to do it, experienced employees who are promoted and need to develop a new set of skills, and veterans who possess years of experience and seem to naturally know what to do in every situation (Tesone, 2004).

### **Training Challenges**

There are several reported challenges in training. For example, because training overlaps daily operations, it is difficult for companies to measure how much they spend on training (Higley, 2004). Therefore, measuring return on investment (ROI, how effectively the company uses its capital for training and the profit from that investment), is also difficult to evaluate (Chapman, 2004).

Another challenge in training that can result in burnout is charging an already overtaxed workforce with the responsibility of acquiring more knowledge and skills. Eight hours per day is usually about the limit for intense training. The answer is not to overload the participants' daily schedule; rather it is to include fun elements in the sessions and build in frequent breaks in order to allow some downtime for attendees (Chapman, 2004). Especially for younger employees, making training fun and integrating training methods such role play and practicing problem-solving skills improve their customer service skills (Berta, 2007). Hence, traditional teaching methods, such as lecturing, might prove ineffective and would have to be altered, starting by allocating more resources, not only for training the employees, but also the trainers (Sullivan, 2009).

AchieveGlobal conducted a survey of 1,100 full-time workers from the U.S. and U.K. representing a range of industries, organization sizes, and positions, and found that employers who assimilate employees'



opinions and preferences into their training programs can make measurable differences in key performance indicators, such as overall job satisfaction. (“Adding employee perspective,” 2004). Findings from this study include: (1) employers must recognize that the method of training delivery significantly impacts employee satisfaction and buy-in; and (2) employers need to know which training programs are valuable to their employees. Surprisingly, the most widely offered training programs, such as new-employee orientation and workplace-issues training, ranked relatively low in value in this study. Instead survey respondents sought more technically oriented training offerings, ranking financial and marketing skills as top priorities. Moreover, managers, professionals, administrative personnel, and service line associates all desired basic leadership and teamwork skills training (“Adding employee perspective,” 2004).

While extensive research has been conducted on the designing and conducting of training sessions, and on the importance of training for organizational advancement, little has been conducted on the actual facilitators and providers of training in the hospitality industry. This research attempts to fill that void by identifying the insights and beliefs of training professionals about the challenges they face in training. The review of related literature revealed limited information on the scope and the variety of challenges faced by hospitality training professionals. This exploratory study has attempted to further understand potential training challenges by using the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) research design.

## **Methodology**

### **In-Depth Interviewing Using Pictures**

Qualitative research uses inductive strategies. The researcher based this study on the ontological assumption that reality is both subjective and multiple. Since each person may perceive reality somewhat differently, analyzing the perspectives of participants (seen in the quotes and themes of discussion) can yield information useful in constructing an understanding of how each has perceived reality. ZMET was used in this study as a means of obtaining greater depth of information (Flick, 2006; Merriam, 1998).

Explicit measures allow participants to think about their evaluative response and respond in any way using their conscious mind. Implicit measures minimize controlled thought from participants. At least 95% of all cognition (thinking) occurs below the level of awareness, while only

5% occurs in consciousness (Zaltman, 2003). Thus, participants in an explicit research, such as a survey or focus group, cannot readily articulate many important thoughts, and they reveal only the information they want to reveal, especially on sensitive topics of inquiry (Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008). Furthermore, in many cases they will not consciously know the answers. A ZMET one-on-one interview of one hour can produce the same number of ideas as one focus group involving a total of eight people (Zaltman, 2003).

In explicit research, it is not unusual for a participant's attitude, recorded by the researcher, to be different from his/her behavior (Latour, 2004). For these reasons this study uses the qualitative, implicit method of data collection, the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique, which involves metaphors. Metaphors populate every aspect of human life, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, language, or other differences (Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008). By inviting the participants to use metaphors as they talk about a product or service, ZMET researchers bring participants' unconscious thoughts and feelings to a level of awareness such that both parties can explore them more openly together (Zaltman, 2003).

## **Sample**

ZMET was performed with 10 training professionals from two hotel casinos in Las Vegas, Nevada, averaging 2,600 rooms in each property. Both properties were members of two mega hotel-casino corporations. The sample included participants that occupied both management and non-management positions since, in some cases, training is delivered by both managers and training coordinators.

Five participants were selected to participate in the study: one human resources training manager, and four training and development coordinators from an on-the-Strip resort that was getting ready to open a few months after this study. The rest of the participants came from an off-the-Strip Las Vegas hotel casino. Among these participants were a hotel-division training manager, two food-and-beverage training managers, a housekeeping training manager, and a reservation training coordinator. Participants in this research were experts in their field, and they represented both genders, a variety of years of experience in the field of hospitality, and a range of different training responsibilities. A complete description of the participants' demographics is depicted in Table I.

## **Data Collection**

The study attempted to identify the insights and beliefs of training professionals about the important challenges they face in training and possible coping mechanisms. For this purpose, ten days before the day of the interview, participants were notified to collect three to ten pictures that described their opinions and impressions about their challenges in training. To prepare for the interview, the participants had to spend a considerable amount of time thinking about the topic and locating the appropriate images from magazines, newspapers, books, the Internet, or other sources. As a result of the pre-planning stage, participants arrived for the in-depth interview at an advanced stage of thinking, ready to discuss their opinions and impressions. During the one-hour, one-on-one interview, training professionals talked through the pictures by using metaphors to describe the challenges they were facing in their job. Metaphors facilitated bringing unconscious feelings and thoughts to a level of awareness, where both parties—interviewee and interviewer—could examine them more openly together. Occasionally, the interviewer used probing techniques to explore in-depth key ideas.

## **Coding**

There are two key skills in ZMET interviewing: (1) listening for relevant concepts and metaphors; and (2) probing to more fully understand the meaning of those concepts and metaphors. Thus, it is important to evoke as much from the first skill as possible and then try to bring more thoughts and feelings to the surface. The analogous skill in ZMET coding is seeing the concepts and metaphors, recognizing them in the transcript, and then coding them in a manner that can be efficiently retrieved and understood when making subsequent interpretations.

The data from the ZMET interviews were transcribed and then content analyzed looking for the identification of constructs and the recognition of links between constructs. Constructs needed to be linked together to more fully capture the meaning they represented; meaning was largely located in the links between concepts.

Researchers tried to capture two broad types of associations, or linkages. One important link was the causal connection between two concepts. The second link was a simple association between two concepts. Some concepts were associated with each other, but not necessarily in a causal manner. Thus, in order to understand the association among constructs that a particular group of training professionals held, consensus maps were developed (see Figures 1, 2, and

3). Atlas.ti version 5 software was used in creating the consensus maps for the training professionals' challenges. This software made it possible to display key concepts and the causal or association linkages between them in a better way—more comprehensively and visually.

### **Limitations**

The study had limitations. Participants in this study came from two large properties averaging 2,600 rooms each; both properties are members of giant hotel-casino corporations. Hence, the sample did not include smaller lodging/casino organizations and different types of hospitality operations. Furthermore, Las Vegas is a unique tourist destination. In this market, room rates fluctuate on a daily and hourly basis, and over 35 million people visit Las Vegas every year. In a traditional tourist destination, room rates fluctuate based on seasonality, or weekdays versus weekends, and the size of the potential guest market is much smaller. Nevertheless, this exploratory study could provide valuable information that could be used to guide future related research.

**Table 1**  
**Professionals Demographics**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Experience in Present Posit.</b>	<b>Experience in Training</b>	<b>Experience in Hospitality</b>
Division Training Manager	Hotel Ops	F	6 years	7 years	15 years
Division Training Manager	Housekeeping	F	2 years	2 years	7 years
Training Coordinator	Reservations	F	5 years	5 years	12 years
Division Training Manager	F&B	F	2.5 years	2.5 years	9 years
Division Training Manager	F&B	M	2 months	8 years	32 years
Training Manager	HR	M	6 years	10 years	31 years
Training Coordinator	HR	M	3 months	3 months	7 years
Training Coordinator	HR	F	3 months	3 months	3 months
Training Coordinator	HR	F	3 months	3 years	2 years
Training Coordinator	HR	F	3 months	3 years	4 years

## **Analysis and Findings**

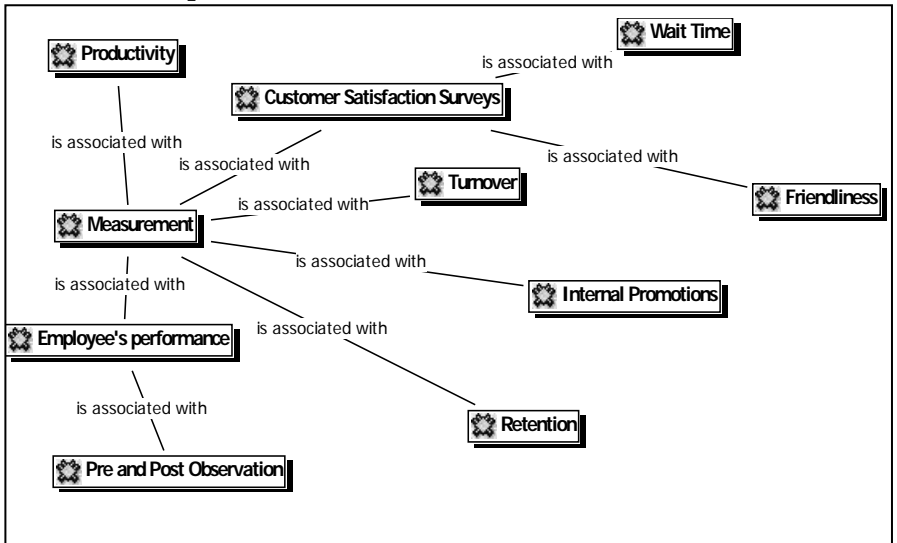
The analysis of the data collected revealed a set of challenges training professionals face in their occupation:

### **Measurement**

One female training manager noted: “Inspect what you expect.” It is important to measure the effectiveness of training in order to evaluate training practices. There are several ways to evaluate training, such as internal promotions, retention rate, employees turnover, productivity, and customer satisfaction surveys (CSS), particularly for employees that have direct contact with guests (see Figure 1). CSS can evaluate front-of-the-house positions, such as front desk agents and employees working at food and beverage outlets, where wait time and friendliness are measured. According to a male food and beverage division training manager, observation is a valuable tool; employees are observed during their shift before and after training (pre- and post-evaluation). Employee performance can also be measured before and after training in assessing training effectiveness, specifically when there is in place a formal system of performance appraisals. However, measuring the training outcome might prove challenging, since it is difficult to separate the effect of training from other internal and external factors.

Figure 1

### Consensus Map of Measurement



### Deadlines

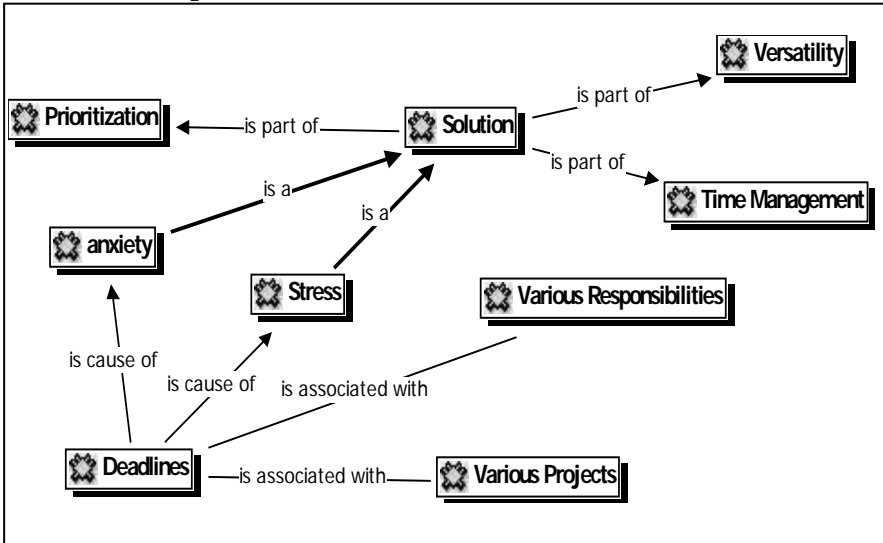
Deadlines can produce stress and anxiety, and time seems always in short supply when it comes to training. One of the two properties that participated in the study was preparing for the grand opening a month after the interviews. Notably, during orientation, management had distributed to each employee a clock that was counting down the days, hours, minutes, seconds, and milliseconds until the exact time of the property's opening. One of the participants noted, "this clock stares me in the face every second of the day that I am at my desk working. Believe it or not it has an immense effect on the way I function, because every time I look at it I see how fast the time goes by" (see Appendix I, "Time is Passing").

Deadlines are associated with various responsibilities and projects that can cause anxiety and stress (see Figure 2). One participant noted that her job was overwhelming because there were always a lot more assignments to be completed than expected. Another participant compared her work to a rollercoaster because each day was different than the previous and it could be full of surprises. Suggested solutions included project prioritization, versatility, and time management. Trainers must be competent to be able to prioritize (evaluate project importance), to be

versatile (juggle different projects), and manage time efficiently (allocate time effectively in order to meet deadlines successfully).

**Figure 2**

**Consensus Map of Deadlines**



**Frustration**

“You are driven because you are frustrated by all this stuff (information, projects, people, and paperwork) and how do I organize all this stuff and fit it in my workday, and make that work for the organization.” The overload of paperwork, information, projects, and people can frustrate training professionals in their attempt to perform effectively (see Figure 3). The longer they hold a position, the more their projects and responsibilities seem to accumulate. Often training managers are the liaison between their department and other departments in the organization; thus they have to deal with different kinds of people in different positions. Novices in training, such as new training coordinators, are often overloaded with information since they have to learn the required training material (e.g., policies and practices) to be able to transfer the information to trainees effectively.

Frequently, trainees do not understand the purpose of training sessions. In particular, exempt employees, such as managers who are not paid overtime for attending a required training session, can feel trapped because they do not fully understanding the “so what?” of a training session and, consequently, its benefits. As a result these employees usually disrespect



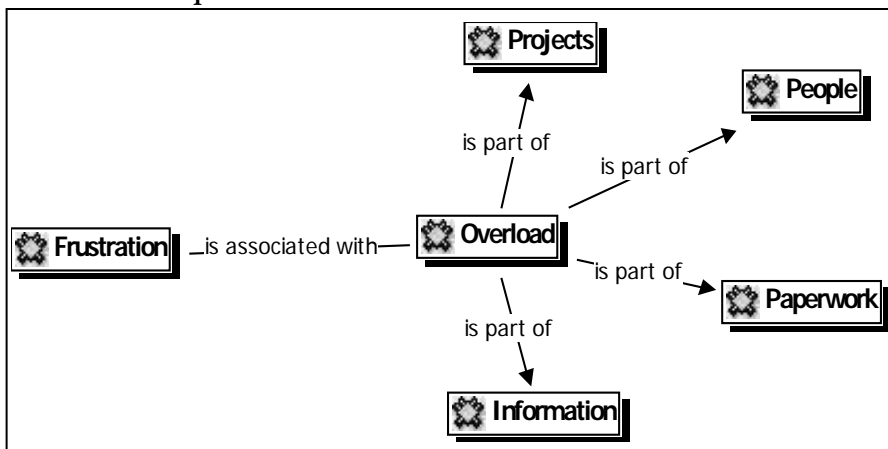
the trainers because they do not value the trainers' contribution to the process and blame them for their entrapment in a classroom.

Trainers can proactively respond to these issues. First, they have to make the participants understand the benefits of attending the seminar, "what is in it for them" (e.g., professional development that will lead to internal promotions). Second, training professionals have to find ways to make training more fun and interesting for the participants. Sharing personal stories with them can be entertaining, and can help trainees relate better to the material.

Being a training professional in Las Vegas can be particularly challenging because that city operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Training applies to all three shifts: day, swing, and graveyard. Trainers must be able to deliver training outside their normal shift hours. That can be challenging, especially if the trainers are working after hours. They have to make sure they stay awake and ensure that trainees are motivated and interested in the training session.

**Figure 3**

### Consensus Map of Frustration



### Keeping Current

Effective trainers must keep current with modern training and development methods and with the latest legislative and organizational changes. "In training and development you always have to keep up with the most current program, initiative, skills, and learning, and so content must be updated." Books and the Internet are tools that participants suggested can be useful in training professionals' development.

## Discussion

The results of the study were consistent with other findings (Higley, 2004; Chapman, 2004): Measurement of the training effect is challenging for training professionals. A potential effective use of Kirkpatrick's scale could be a way to address the training measurement challenge. According to Kirkpatrick's scale there are four levels in measuring training effectiveness: (1) reaction and planned action, whereby trainees are asked to evaluate the training session; (2) learning, whereby trainees are asked to complete a pre- and post-test to identify whether new skills and knowledge are retained; (3) application, whereby participants are often observed on the job to assess whether they acquired the required competencies; and (4) business impact. The American Society of Training and Development has added a fifth level, which is the return on investment. The true challenge of measuring training comes with the fourth stage, whereby the only scientific way to isolate training as a variable would be to isolate a representative control group within the larger trainee population, and then roll out the training program, complete the evaluation, and compare it against a business evaluation of the non-trained group. Unfortunately, this is rarely done because of the difficulty of gathering the business data and the complexity of isolating the training intervention as a unique variable (Clemenz, 2003).

Objective and effective measurement can be a challenge if it is not performed professionally because its implementation requires technical knowledge that is often acquired in graduate-level studies. Hospitality companies must hire employees with adequate competencies to ensure proper measurement that will ensure appropriate follow-up actions.

New findings include the pressure of training professionals for having to deal with deadlines. Previous studies (Chapman, 2004; Saks, 2006) discuss stress and training from the trainees' point of view. Often, the longer training professionals hold a position with an organization, the more their responsibilities increase, resulting in amplified frustration and pressure. This can also be attributed to the unique nature of hospitality companies that often operate 24 hours a day and seven days a week, unlike the rest of the service sector. Training professionals are facing increasing deadlines and are expected to present better results with restricted resources, especially in difficult economic downturns, when satisfactory performance and profitability are crucial to the company's survival. More effective use of technology, efficient time management, prioritization of projects, and versatility can provide remedies to

frustration. The use of technology can minimize paperwork and can also help diversify the training delivery inside and outside the classroom. To minimize the time spent in a classroom, online technical training can be offered such that trainees can complete the training session at their convenience.

Creating a fun and friendly environment in which trainees are informed about the benefits of training, without overburdening them with many hours of idle training, is the key to training effectiveness (Berta, 2007; Kalargyrou & Woods, 2010; Sullivan 2009). Adult learners can remain focused on a lecture for no more than 15 to 20 minutes at a time, and this at the beginning of the class (Middendorf & Kalish, 1996). The attention span seems to be getting shorter because of the sensory overload that young people are constantly exposed to in today's digital world. The child of the remote control might have a shorter attention range but also the ability to multitask and do many things at once (Puchta, 2007).

Often, training professionals and academics face similar challenges, such as frustration, creating an interesting learning environment, keeping current, and effectively measuring the training/teaching effect. It is demanding to keep a class interested in the material presented and to be able to effectively measure the outcome of teaching. A teacher's concerns include whether the students learn the material, and whether they can apply it in their work. Having a good sense of **humor**, keeping an open mind, and sharing personal stories in the classroom are useful tools, and must be integrated into a training/teaching session. To be able to deliver the desired outcome effectively in a dynamic environment, both academics and training professionals must keep current with new training and pedagogical methods and the changes in their field of expertise (Edwards, 1994; Kaupins, 1993).

In premier tourist destinations, such as Las Vegas, where the competition is fierce, operators need to differentiate by offering exceptional customer service and innovative products. To be competitive, training professionals must keep current with new technology and ensure consistent customer service quality. For this purpose, leadership must invest in train-the-trainer seminars, conferences, and new technology to facilitate the acquisition and transferability of knowledge.

Diversity and culture were not noted in the study as significant training challenges, as other studies suggested. A possible explanation can be that in Las Vegas and the wider West coast area, minority groups and

women are fully integrated into the hospitality workforce. In particular, in some departments, such as housekeeping, environmental services (EVS), and food and beverage, Hispanics and African Americans compose a big part of the workforce.

The role of training professionals is important in the hospitality industry because effective training and development increase employee loyalty to the company and decrease employee turnover. This is achieved through developing the workforce and offering the employees career opportunities for internal promotions. Moreover, development is a powerful tool for fostering a good reputation for the organization; it results in attracting talented employees and increasing its pool of candidates.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to identify the challenges of hospitality training professionals and corresponding coping mechanisms. This was accomplished through interviewing ten experts in training and development in two mega resorts in Las Vegas, Nevada. The Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET), considered a methodological innovation in establishing training and development needs, was used for data collection. The ZMET is based on interpreting metaphors from pictures brought in by the interviewees (Zaltman, 2003). During the interpretation of pictures, study participants noted that hidden feelings and thoughts surfaced that they did not know existed before the interview. A set of challenges was identified: measuring training effectiveness, maintaining deadlines, keeping current, and encountering frustrations with being effective on the job.

Participants in this study came from two large properties averaging 2,600 rooms each. Both properties are members of very large hotel-casino corporations. Therefore, future studies should include the training and development departments of smaller-sized properties. Second, both properties are situated in Las Vegas, Nevada, a unique tourist destination. Hence, for a more complete image of the hospitality industry, future research should include more tourist destinations in the United States. Third, this study has focused on in-house training professionals. An extension of this study could investigate hotels that outsource human resources training and development to perform interview training. Fourth, in addition to the qualitative method that has been used, more objective quantitative methods, such as a survey, could be used in order to approach a larger number of training professionals. Finally, the researcher interviewed training professionals; for a more

holistic approach future studies could examine training challenges from the trainees' point of view.

## Appendix

### Deadlines

*“Time is passing”*



“My first day of orientation at the hotel X, I was given a little “X” clock which counts down the days, hours, minutes, seconds and even milliseconds until the exact hour of the opening of the hotel. **This clock stares me in the face every second of the day that I am at my desk working. Believe it or not it has an immense effect on the way I function, because every time I look at it I see how fast the time goes by.** I also notice that it only goes backwards and never forward, which means that if I waste one minute, that is one minute of my life that I will never get back. I try to be very time-conscious at work and therefore efficient in the way that I meet deadlines.”

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