

Predicting hospitality management students' intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry on graduation: a person–environment fit perspective

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates factors predicting hospitality management students' intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry upon graduation. Survey data were collected from 591 hospitality management students in a hotel management school in the Netherlands. Results of multiple regression analyses showed that study progress negatively predicted, while preferences for large organisations, engaging work content and growth opportunities positively predicted students' intention to enter the hospitality industry. Supplementary analyses further revealed that among higher study year students, growth opportunity was the most crucial predictor for intention to enter the industry. Theoretical and practical implications were discussed.

KEYWORDS: study progress, person–job fit, person–organisation fit, career intention, hospitality students

Introduction

It is widely recognised that the hospitality industry is experiencing challenges in attaining and retaining talented, motivated and qualified staff (Brien, 2004; Baum, 2006; Richardson, 2008; 2009; Song & Chathoth, 2008). There are understandable and seemingly legitimate reasons for these challenges, for example, many consider hospitality jobs to be associated with relatively low pay and low status, comparatively high labour-intensiveness and substantial work-life balance issues (e.g. shift work, working on weekends and during holidays). This staffing challenge is so considerable that it is regarded as one of the top ten issues faced by the global hospitality industry in the 21st century (International Society of Hospitality Consultants, 2006; Richardson, 2009). Even among hospitality management students pursuing an education in this specific field, many choose not to enter the hospitality industry on graduation. Instead, they enter employment in related fields such as luxury retailing, banking, fashion, leisure and travel (Lor & Kall, 2018; Hsu & Hilterbrand, 2019).

To better understand why some hospitality management students are more inclined to enter employment in the hospitality industry, while others are less inclined to do so, hospitality scholars have examined various potential predictors of hospitality students' career intentions and found different categories of predictors, such as job related features, e.g. leader behaviour and challenging work (Walsh & Taylor, 2007), environmental and situational influencers, e.g. parental influence and advice from important others, internship experience in the

industry (Chuang & Dellmann-Jenkins, 2010; Wong & Liu, 2010), and students' individual personal factors, e.g. self-efficacy, work value and attitude and career outcome expectations (Chuang & Dellmann-Jenkins, 2010; Song & Chathoth, 2011).

This study builds on the progress that has been made by prior research and further examines meaningful and previously untapped factors which may predict hospitality management students' intention to enter employment in the industry on graduation. Using the person-environment fit theory (Edwards, 1991; Kristof-Brown, 2000; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) as the fundamental theoretical underpinning, this study investigates how hospitality management students' preferences for several key person-organisation fit and person-job fit dimensions predict their intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry. Specifically, this study proposes three categories of predictors for hospitality students' intention to enter employment in the industry: students' background variables (prior industry experience, study progress); their preference for person-organisation fit factors (organisation size, culture, reputation); and preference for person-job fit factors (engaging work content, growth opportunities and salary). The selection of these variables is based on their theoretical relevance as evidenced by research and theory in both the hospitality field (e.g. Richardson, 2008; 2009; Blomme et al., 2009; Walsh et al., 2015) and person-environment fit literature (Kristof-Brown, 2000; Verquer et al., 2003; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Venkatesh et al., 2017). As such, the objective of this study is to empirically examine to what extent the abovementioned three

categories of variables predict hospitality students' intention to enter employment in the industry on graduation.

In conceptualising and empirically examining the research model as shown in Figure 1, this study seeks to address the following research objectives. First, this study systematically examines a range of relevant predictors within one single investigation. In doing so, the findings can be coherently viewed and interpreted as a whole, allowing readers to draw potential conclusions as to the relative importance of the different predictors included in the study. Second, whereas previous research yielded descriptive and indicative findings (Blomme et al., 2009; Lor & Kall, 2018; Hsu & Hilterbrand, 2019), this study seeks to demonstrate and verify these previous patterns of descriptive and indicative findings using more stringent analyses (instead of descriptive measures). Finally, this study applies theories and research findings from general human resource and organisational behaviour research to specifically investigate employment intentions in the hospitality sector, thus creating bridges and connections between related fields of research.

Literature review and hypotheses

This theoretical section conceptualises the expected relationships between the predictors and the outcome variable – hospitality students' intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry. In formulating the hypotheses, this study first explores how base-level factors (prior experience and study progress) would predict the dependent variable, then person-organisation fit factors are taken into account, and finally, person-job fit factors. This sequence is in line with prior research and meta-analytical findings showing that while person-organisation fit and person-job fit factors are both predictive of employee behaviours and cognitions, person-job fit is overall a stronger predictor of employee-perceived employer attraction (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Kwok et al., 2011). Consequently, when developing and testing hypotheses, this study follows the sequence of base-level factors, person-organisation fit factors and person-job fit factors.

Experience and study progress

Previous research examining hospitality employment intentions provides useful directions concerning several potential, base-level control variables which may predict hospitality management students' intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry (Richardson, 2008; 2009; Blomme et al., 2009; Walsh et al., 2015). For instance, Walsh et al.'s (2015) research took into account, among other factors, gender and exam scores as control variables. Their findings have shown neither gender nor exam scores to be related to employment intention. Richardson's studies (2008; 2009) included as control variables factors such as gender, type of enrolment (full-time/part-time), type of student (domestic/foreign), number of credits and prior working experience in hospitality and tourism (yes/no). As Richardson's studies were not predictive in nature, no correlations and regressions were reported as to whether these controls related to employment intention. However, the inclusion of these factors by Richardson (2008; 2009) did indicate the theoretical relevance of these control variables in examining hospitality students' intention to enter employment in the industry. Blomme et al.'s (2009) study incorporated age, gender, stage of study and working experience in the hospitality

industry as control variables. Their findings, specifically Tukey post hoc comparisons that they did, have shown that the respondents' key perceptions and behavioural intentions concerning employment in the hospitality industry differ significantly among those with different levels of experience in the hospitality industry. For example, in-education hospitality management students perceive hospitality employment to be more international compared to actual hospitality employees in the industry. In-education hospitality management students also have significantly higher expectations regarding salary compared to recent graduates and actual hospitality employees in the industry. Blomme et al. (2009) also offered some discussion and exploration regarding why students of different study years in their institute showed different expectations regarding the industry. That is, they offered the potential explanation that lower year students had a lack of experience in the industry, and therefore, might have unrealistic expectations of the industry and might be more uncertain about their future employment intentions. While Blomme et al. (2009) reported no significant difference in employment intention or key perceptions of the industry based on age or gender, their findings regarding industry experience and study progress are of particular interest for future research.

Consistent with these prior research findings, this study also does not expect age and gender to be meaningful predictors of hospitality management students' intention to enter employment in the industry. Instead, this study focuses on examining students' previous working experience in the hospitality industry and students' study progress as being predictive of their intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry. The inclusion of these two control variables in prior research illustrates their potential theoretical relevance, and the comparative findings by Blomme et al. (2009) have paved the way for formulating the directions of the relationships between these two variables and students' intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry. This study puts forward that students' prior work experience in the hospitality industry is a positive predictor of their intention to enter employment in the industry on graduation. The fact that a student has had a longer prior working experience in the industry, either on a full-time or part-time basis, would likely indicate not only realistic, first-hand awareness of the industry, but more importantly, a fit between the student as a person and working in the hospitality field as an employee. As such, hospitality management students' prior work experience in the industry would positively predict these students' intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry.

Study year is also a meaningful predictor of students' intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry on graduation as it indicates students' knowledge of and expectations regarding what employment in the industry involves. As the findings of Blomme et al. (2009) show, first-year hospitality students, compared with graduates and actual employees in the industry, are likely to have less knowledge of the industry and their expectations of the industry tend to be less accurate and less realistic. First-year hospitality students tend to have more positive expectations regarding job content, development opportunities, salary and career opportunities that employment in the hospitality industry entails (Blomme et al., 2009). These inaccurately positive, pre-entry expectations of the industry are shaped to be more realistic by the educational programme

that hospitality students systematically go through. One of the key focal points of the hospitality management curriculum, as identified by Min et al. (2016), was indeed to fully prepare students for employment in the industry by equipping them with proper knowledge of, experience in and skills required by the industry. Consequently, as students progress through their education and move from lower to higher study years, their knowledge of and expectations regarding employment in the hospitality industry are likely to become more accurate, more realistic and perhaps less positive. This may appear, at first, somewhat counter-intuitive, but the facts as shown by previous research (Blomme et al., 2009) are quite clear. Compared with graduates and hospitality employees, first-year students have overly positive expectations regarding working in the industry and these expectations become less positive and more realistic as they progress through their education. Accordingly, it would be logical to hypothesise that study year would be negatively related to students' intention to seek employment in the hospitality industry. In line with the above reasoning, the following predictions are formulated.

- Hypothesis 1: Students' prior working experience in the hospitality industry positively (H1a) and study year negatively (H1b) predict students' intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry on graduation.

Organisation-specific preferences

Person-environment fit research is centred on the extent to which an individual's characteristics match the environment in which the individual functions (e.g. Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987; Edwards, 1991; Kristof-Brown, 2000; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Person-environment fit research tends to focus on two key areas: person-organisation fit and person-job fit. Person-organisation fit focuses on the congruence between the characteristics, interests and preferences of an individual and what an organisation can offer across its broad organisational environment (Edwards, 1991; Kristof-Brown, 2000). Relevant to the focus of this investigation of students' intention to seek employment in the hospitality industry, three perceived person-organisation fit factors are taken into account: size, reputation and culture. This study focuses on these three factors due to their potential importance and relevance as identified by prior research.

The first factor considered here is the size of the hotel. Hotel size predicts a wide range of hotel performance outcomes as well as employee and customer perceptions and behaviours (Claver-Cortés et al., 2007; Garrido-Moreno & Lockett, 2016). One of the key reasons that hotel size matters is that the larger a hotel is, the greater the chance it can generate economies of scale through its operations, be it in revenue, occupancy, social media presence, scope of business, or further investment and effort in expansion (Claver-Cortés et al., 2007). The annual Young Hoteliers Summit's (YHS) hospitality employer rankings of recent years (Lor & Kall, 2018; Hsu & Hilterbrand, 2019) have consistently shown that hospitality management students and graduates prefer employment with large, luxury, upper upscale, international hotel brands on graduation, instead of small, independent, midscale and budget properties. As such, there are reasons and evidence to suggest that organisation size is a significant and meaningful predictor of students' employment intention. More specifically, larger hotels would be considered more attractive by hospitality management students who intend to enter employment in the industry.

The second factor is reputation of the organisation. The above-cited YHS hospitality employer rankings (Lor & Kall, 2018; Hsu & Hilterbrand, 2019) highlight that hospitality students and graduates attach great importance to the reputation and prestige of hotels and hotel chains. Lor and Kall's (2018) ranking data show that "reputation/prestige" is the top reason for respondents to name a particular brand to work for in the hospitality industry. Reputation is important not only for hospitality students and graduates, but also for existing hotel employees. Research has empirically demonstrated that employees' perceived reputation of the hotel is positively related to employee psychological empowerment, organisation-based self-esteem, leader-member exchange and job satisfaction (Tuna et al., 2016). In sum, prior research findings are highly indicative that hospitality students with a strong intention to enter employment in the industry would be attracted to work for hotels and/or hotel chains with a positive reputation.

The third organisation-specific preference factor which this study considers is organisational culture. The congruence between an organisation's culture and an individual's values is a key element of person-organisation fit (Edwards, 1991; Cable & Judge, 1996; Kristof-Brown, 2000) because organisational culture serves a fundamental function in creating and maintaining the overall work environment in which the individual employee operates (Venkatesh et al., 2017). An organisation's culture encompasses the organisation's mission and vision, values and norms, and can considerably influence its members' work attitudes and behaviours (Robbins & Judge, 2017). Specific to the hospitality industry, organisational culture has been found to be a meaningful predictor of a range of employee behaviours and job attitudes such as employee voice and helping behaviour (Wang et al., 2019), job satisfaction (Pawirosumarto et al., 2017), employee perceived citizenship pressure (Youn et al., 2017) and employee turnover intention (Ozturk et al., 2014). Given the importance of organisational culture's potential influence on hospitality employees, one would expect that for potential employees, the fit between an organisation's culture and the individual's preferences would be key to their intention to join and work for that hospitality enterprise. Consistent with this line of reasoning, this study proposes that, in the context of intention to enter employment in the industry, hospitality students would be more likely to join the industry when they perceive a stronger fit with the target hotel's organisational culture.

Taken together, prior person-organisation fit and hospitality research findings indicate that organisation size, reputation and culture would predict students' intention to join employment in the hospitality industry. Hence, the second hypothesis of this study.

- Hypothesis 2: Organisation size (H2a), reputation (H2b) and culture (H2c) positively predict students' intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry on graduation.

Job-specific preferences

Person-job fit focuses on the congruence between the characteristics, interests and preferences of an individual and their job (Edwards, 1991; Kristof-Brown, 2000; Venkatesh et al., 2017). A strong, perceived person-job fit on the part of an employee can increase job satisfaction (Verquer et al., 2003), commitment (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), psychological well-being (Park et al., 2011) and can reduce employee turnover intention (Verquer et al., 2003). Person-job fit differs from

person-organisation fit in the sense that person-organisation fit deals with the question "do I fit in this organisation?", whereas person-job fit relates to one's *vocational* interests and preferences concerning the job, or the question "do I fit this job?". Relying on prior research and theory on person-job fit (Kristof-Brown, 2000; Verquer et al., 2003; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Venkatesh et al., 2017) and research on hospitality students and staff motivation (Richardson, 2008; 2009; Blomme et al., 2009; Brown et al., 2014; Walsh et al., 2015), the present study focuses on three key factors as predictors for hospitality students' intention to join employment in the industry on graduation, namely engaging work, competitive salary and growth opportunities.

The first factor under consideration is the nature of one's job content, which is of importance for employment intention and motivation. Hospitality scholars have incorporated this factor in their research on students' employment intention (Richardson, 2008; 2009; Blomme et al., 2009). Blomme et al. (2009) took into account the degree to which hospitality students and graduates believed that employment in the hospitality industry entailed engaging work content, and Richardson (2008; 2009) measured students' perceptions of and preferences for the degree with which hospitality jobs could offer them intellectual challenges, respect, pleasure and the ability to fully use their skills and competencies. As Blomme et al.'s (2009) and Richardson's (2008; 2009) studies were descriptive and comparative in nature, and they did not report correlation or regression results regarding the work nature variables that they measured in relation to employment intention. However, the inclusion of these variables in their studies was fully consistent with person-job fit literature (Kristof-Brown, 2000; Verquer et al., 2003; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Venkatesh et al., 2017) which has shown that engaging work content is key to perceived person-job fit. In line with the prior literature and research findings, this study takes into account students' potential preferences for engaging work content, and proposes that students would be more inclined to join employment in the industry when they perceive the nature of hospitality work to be engaging.

Another meaningful predictor of hospitality students' intention to start employment in the industry is salary. Research has consistently shown that salary is one of the key components of job satisfaction (e.g. Vandenberghe & Tremblay, 2008), employee motivation (e.g. Jung & Yoon, 2015) and perceived person-job fit (e.g. Venkatesh et al., 2017). Hospitality researchers have also included student and graduate expectations and wishes about salary in their studies of employment intentions (Richardson, 2008; 2009; Blomme et al., 2009). Hospitality employer ranking data also indicate that competitive pay and salary is one of the factors which students and graduates care about and want from a hospitality career (Lor & Kall, 2018; Hsu & Hilterbrand, 2019). Consequently, this study incorporates students' preferences for competitive salaries as a meaningful predictor of their potential entry to employment in the hospitality industry.

Finally, growth opportunities are relevant for motivating and attracting hospitality students and graduates to enter employment in the industry. Similar to engaging work content and competitive salary, growth and advancement have also been implicated in much previous research on students' and graduates' intentions to enter the industry (Richardson, 2008; 2009; Blomme et al., 2009). The general pattern of findings from empirical research and employer ranking data (Lor & Kall,

2018; Hsu & Hilterbrand, 2019) is that students want growth and advancement opportunities, and they attach great importance to them when choosing whether or not to enter employment in the industry. Hsu and Hilterbrand (2019) found that career path and development was the top motivational factor for hospitality students and graduates to enter the industry. For students who are at the beginning stage of their careers, their desire for growth and development may be the most crucial factor which outweighs other considerations when they choose whether or not to enter the industry on graduation. In sum, prior research findings suggest that growth opportunities would be a powerful predictor of hospitality students to enter employment in the industry on graduation.

In line with the above predictions, the third hypothesis is formulated as follows:

- Hypothesis 3: Hospitality students' preference for engaging work content (H3a), salary (H3b) and growth opportunities (H3c) positively predicts their intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry on graduation.

Taken together, this study takes into account three categories of predictors for hospitality students' intention to enter employment in the industry: students' background variables (prior industry experience, study progress), their fit preferences for organisational factors (size, culture, reputation) and fit preferences for job specific factors (engaging work content, growth opportunities and salary). The conceptualised model and relationships are shown in Figure 1.

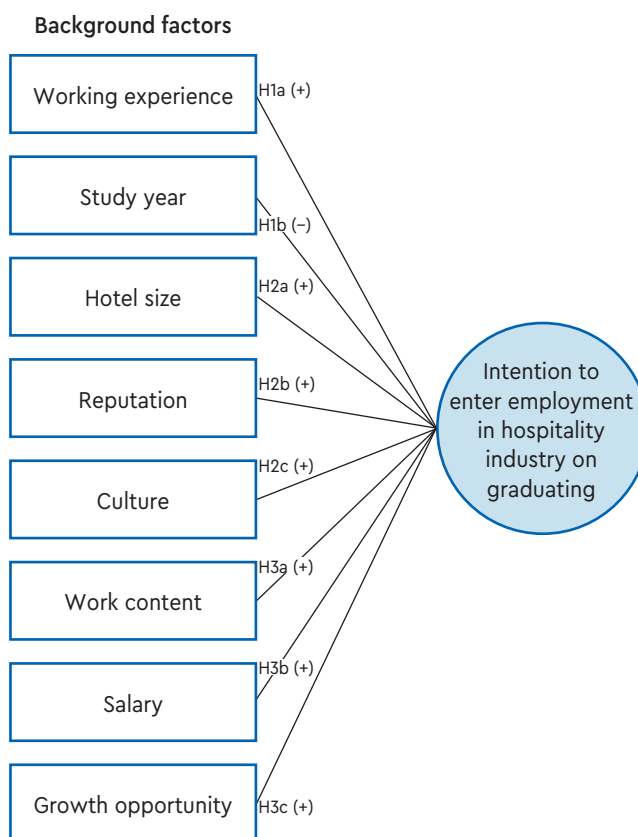


FIGURE 1. Research model

Method

Participants and procedure

Data were collected from students enrolled in a hotel management school in the Netherlands. Students from all study years (four years in the undergraduate programme of hospitality management and one year in the graduate programme of hospitality and service management) were approached to participate in the study. A self-completion survey, which typically took five to eight minutes to fill out, was administered in class with the help of tutors and lecturers. The survey was anonymous and participation was voluntary. Ten faculty members, each responsible for six teaching or coaching groups, assisted in the data collection process. In total, approximately 720 students were approached, and 591 usable surveys were returned, resulting in a response rate, based on a non-probability sampling procedure, of 82%.

Among the 591 respondents, 217 were male, 364 female, 10 chose not to reveal their gender; the majority ($n = 420$; 72%) of respondents were Dutch, while other main nationalities included German, Chinese and Vietnamese; most respondents ($n = 449$; 76%) were between 19 and 24 years old; in terms of study year, there were 208 first year, 90 second year, 252 third year, 13 fourth year and 28 master's students; most of the respondents had prior working experience in the hospitality industry ($n = 537$; 91%), with only nine per cent reporting no prior working experience in the industry at all.

Measures

Prior experience and study year

Prior experience in the industry was measured by asking respondents "Have you ever worked in the hospitality industry (and if so, for how long)?". The response scale ranged between "no experience", "less than one year", "between one and two years", "between two and three years" and "more than three years". Study year was measured by asking respondents to indicate which study year of the programme they were following at the time of completing the survey. The response scale included "first year", "second year", "third year", "fourth year" and "master's".

Organisation size

The first organisation-specific preference measured was size. Respondents were given a series of statements regarding their preferred organisation to work for on graduation. The statement designed to tap into their preference for organisation size was "I want to work for a large organisation, instead of a small one". The response scale ranged from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

Organisation reputation

The second organisation-specific preference measured was reputation. In the series of statements regarding their preferred organisation to work for on graduation, respondents were given the statement "I find the reputation of the company important". The response scale ranged from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

Organisational culture

The third organisation-specific preference measured was culture. In the series of statements regarding their preferred organisation to work for on graduation, respondents were given the

statement "I want the culture and atmosphere of the company to be clearly described in the job advertisement". The response scale ranged from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

Engaging work content

The first job-specific preference was the preference for engaging work content. Respondents were given three statements from Blomme et al. (2009) regarding work content. Sample items are "I want to have a job which challenges me" and "I want to have a job in which I feel involved". The response scale ranged from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The Cronbach's alpha for these three items was calculated to be 0.77 (95% CI 0.73–0.80).

Growth opportunities

The second job-specific preference was the preference for growth opportunities. Respondents were given three statements adapted from Blomme et al. (2009) and Richardson (2009) to understand their preference for growth opportunities. Sample items are "I want to have the possibility to grow further in my organisation" and "I would like to know that there are development opportunities". The response scale ranged from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The Cronbach's alpha for these three items was calculated to be 0.73 (95% CI 0.69–0.76).

Salary

The third job-specific preference was the preference for a competitive salary. In the series of statements regarding their preferred job features, respondents were asked to rate the following statement: "Salary and benefits are the most important for me when choosing my job" to measure the extent to which they consider salary to be important in their consideration to enter employment in the hospitality industry or not. The response scale ranged from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

Intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry

The dependent variable, students' intention to join the industry, was measured through two statements adopted from Blomme et al. (2009) and Richardson (2008): "After this study, I am considering working in the hospitality industry" and "With all considered, the hospitality industry is the type of industry in which I can make a living". The response scale ranged from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The Cronbach's alpha for these two items was calculated to be 0.75 (95% CI 0.71–0.79).

Control variables

Consistent with prior research (Richardson, 2008; 2009; Blomme et al., 2009), this study included student age, gender and nationality as demographic control variables. This study also included a number of statements related to job expectations, in line with Blomme et al. (2009) and Richardson (2008; 2009), as additional control variables. These statements tapped into respondents' expectations regarding the number of hours per week they would work after graduation (i.e. "less than 30 hours", "between 30 and 40 hours", "between 40 and 50 hours" and "more than 50 hours") and the level that they would obtain in the industry after graduation (i.e. "operational", "supervisory", "assistant department manager", "department manager", "general management or higher").

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table 1 includes descriptive statistics of and correlations between all variables included in this study. Each of the control variables is shown to be related to one or more of the study variables. Consequently, the control variables are retained in subsequent multiple regression analyses (Becker, 2005). The dependent variable of the study, entry intention, is negatively related to study year and positively related to expected hours to work, expected position level, engaging work content and growth opportunities.

Multiple regression analyses

Hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analyses. Model 1 examines the effects of demographic, study and control variables on the dependent variable; then in Model 2, organisation-specific preferences are incorporated (i.e. preference for large organisation, reputation and fitting organisational culture); and finally, Model 3 takes into account job-specific preferences (i.e. preference for engaging work content, growth opportunities and competitive salary). The outcomes of the regression analyses are shown in Table 2.

The results of Model 1 show that study year is a negative predictor ($B = -0.14$, $p < 0.01$) and expected position level is a positive predictor ($B = 0.08$, $p < 0.01$) for students' intention to enter the industry on graduation. Model 2 incorporates organisation-specific preferences as predictors in addition to the control variables. Results of Model 2 show that study year ($B = -0.13$, $p < 0.01$), prior working experience in the industry ($B = 0.05$, $p < 0.05$), expected position level ($B = 0.07$, $p < 0.05$), organisation reputation ($B = 0.10$, $p < 0.05$) and organisation size ($B = 0.06$, $p < 0.05$) to be significant predictors of the dependent variable. Finally, Model 3 adds job-specific preferences as predictors and the results show that study year ($B = -0.13$, $p < 0.01$), expected position level ($B = 0.07$, $p < 0.05$), organisation size ($B = 0.07$, $p < 0.05$), engaging work content ($B = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$) and growth opportunities ($B = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$) to be significant predictors of the dependent variable.

Hypotheses testing

The statistical results of the multiple regression analyses are shown in Table 2 and all hypothesis testing outcomes are summarised in Table 3 and Figure 2. Hypothesis 1a states that students' prior working experience in the hospitality industry positively predicts their intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry on graduation. Model 2 shows that prior working experience in the industry ($B = 0.05$, $p < 0.05$) does predict the dependent variable, and when both job-specific and organisation-specific preferences are taken into account in Model 3, prior working experience is no longer a significant predictor ($B = 0.04$, *non-significant [ns]*). Consequently, Hypothesis 1a is not supported.

TABLE 2. Multiple regression analyses testing hypotheses ($N = 591$)

Control variables	Intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry upon graduation		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	3.63**	2.92**	1.73**
Age	0.02	0.01	0.01
Study year	-0.14**	-0.13**	-0.13**
Industry experience	0.04	0.05*	0.04
Expected position level	0.08**	0.07*	0.07*
Expected hours to work	0.09	0.09	0.05
Organisation-specific preferences			
Organisation reputation		0.10*	0.03
Organisation size		0.06*	0.07*
Organisation culture		0.03	0.02
Job-specific preferences			
Engaging work content			0.23**
Growth opportunity			0.18*
High salary			-0.07
Model statistics			
R^2	0.07**	0.09**	0.13**
ΔR^2	0.07**	0.02**	0.04**
F	8.15**	6.81**	7.86**
ΔF	8.15**	4.35**	9.83**

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Regression coefficients are unstandardised values

TABLE 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations ($N = 591$)

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Age	2.30	0.87											
Study year	2.26	1.11	0.50**										
Industry experience	3.71	1.42	0.20**	0.12**									
Expected hours to work	2.57	0.72	0.08*	0.01	0.11**								
Expected position level	3.51	1.17	-0.16**	-0.20**	0.01	0.08*							
Organisation reputation	4.06	0.73	0.01	-0.02	-0.01	0.00	0.00						
Organisation size	3.19	1.05	0.02	-0.02	-0.13**	0.02	0.02	0.20**					
Organisation culture	3.53	0.79	0.15**	0.12**	-0.06	-0.04	-0.05	0.15**	0.14**				
Engaging work content	4.42	0.48	0.05	-0.04	0.09*	0.20**	0.12**	0.22**	0.03	0.00			
Growth opportunities	4.37	0.43	0.05	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.01	0.34**	0.17**	0.20**	0.45**		
Salary	2.90	0.92	0.08	0.05	-0.02	-0.06	0.07	-0.02	0.23**	0.14**	-0.08	-0.01	
Entry intention	4.00	0.78	-0.07	-0.19**	0.07	0.10*	0.15**	0.12**	0.10*	0.02	0.24**	0.20**	-0.07

Age: 1 = 16-18 years, 2 = 19-21 years, 3 = 22-24 years, 4 = 25-27 years, 5 = 28+ years

Study year: 1 = first year, 2 = second year, 3 = third year, 4 = fourth year, 5 = master's

Industry experience: 1 = no experience, 2 = less than a year, 3 = 1-2 years, 4 = 2-3 years, 5 = 3+ years

Expected hours to work: 1 = less than 30 hours/week, 2 = 31-40 hours, 3 = 41-50 hours, 4 = 50+ hours

Expected position level: 1 = operational, 2 = supervisory, 3 = assistant department manager, 4 = departmental manager, 5 = general management or higher

Other variables measured on five-point Likert scale

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

TABLE 3. Outcomes of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Prediction	Outcome
H1a	Students' <i>prior working experience</i> in the hospitality industry positively predicts their intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry upon graduation.	Not supported
H1b	Students' <i>study year</i> negatively predicts their intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry upon graduation.	Supported
H2a	Students' preference for a <i>large organisation</i> is a positive predictor of their intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry upon graduation.	Supported
H2b	<i>Organisation reputation</i> positively predicts students' intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry upon graduation.	Not supported
H2c	<i>Organisational culture fit</i> positively predicts students' intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry upon graduation.	Not supported
H3a	Students' preference for <i>engaging work content</i> positively predicts their intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry upon graduation.	Supported
H3b	Students' preference for a <i>high salary</i> positively predicts their intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry upon graduation.	Not supported
H3c	Students' preference for <i>growth opportunities</i> positively predicts their intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry upon graduation.	Supported

Hypothesis 1b states that students' study year negatively predicts their intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry on graduation. The outcome of the regression analysis shows that study year is a significant and negative predictor of the dependent variable when all other control and study variables are included ($B = -0.13, p < 0.01$). As such, Hypothesis 1b is supported.

Hypothesis 2a states that students' preference for large organisations is a positive predictor of their intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry on graduation. The outcome of the regression analysis shows that organisation

size is a significant and positive predictor of the dependent variable, with all other control and study variables included in the regression analysis ($B = 0.07, p < 0.05$). Consequently, Hypothesis 2a is supported.

Hypothesis 2b states that organisation reputation positively predicts students' intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry on graduation. The outcome of the regression analysis shows that reputation, although a significant predictor in Model 2 ($B = 0.10, p < 0.05$), loses its significant prediction power when job-specific preferences are taken into account ($B = 0.03, ns$). As such, Hypothesis 2b is not supported.

Hypothesis 2c states that organisational culture fit positively predict students' intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry on graduation. The outcome of the regression analysis shows that under no condition is organisational culture a significant predictor of the dependent variable (Model 2: $B = 0.03, ns$; Model 3: $B = 0.02, ns$). As such, Hypothesis 2c is not supported.

Hypothesis 3a states that hospitality students' preference for engaging work content positively predicts their intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry on graduation. The outcome of the regression analysis shows that engaging work is a significant and positive predictor of the dependent variable when other control and study variables are included in the regression model ($B = 0.23, p < 0.01$). Hypothesis 3a is supported.

Hypothesis 3b states that hospitality students' preference for a high salary positively predicts their intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry on graduation. The outcome of the regression analysis indicates that salary is a non-significant predictor of the dependent variable ($B = -0.07, ns$). Hypothesis 3b is not supported.

Hypothesis 3c states that hospitality students' preference for growth opportunities (H4c) positively predicts their intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry on graduation. The outcome of the regression analysis shows that growth opportunities are a significant and positive predictor for the dependent variable when all other control and study variables are included in the regression analysis ($B = 0.18, p < 0.05$). As such, Hypothesis 3c is supported.

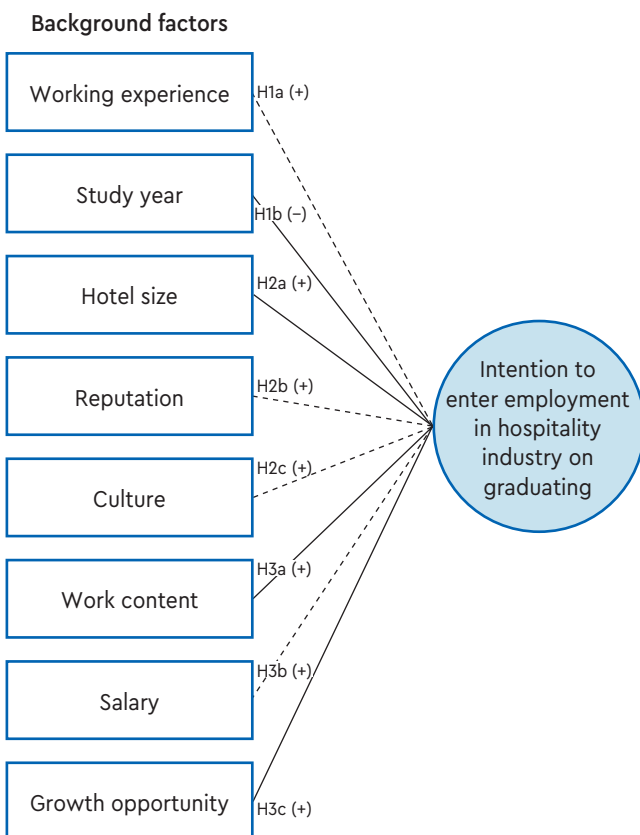


FIGURE 2. Outcomes of hypothesis testing

Supplementary analyses

The outcomes of the correlation and regression analyses show that study year is a significant and negative predictor of the dependent variable. To further examine the potential differences among students of different study years in terms of their expectations and intentions regarding employment in the industry, an ANOVA was performed. The findings show that first-year students tend to have, among other differences, significantly higher expectations about the kind of positions they would be offered ($F(4, 586) = 6.66, p < 0.01$), and they also have significantly higher intention to join employment in the industry ($F(4, 586) = 9.80, p < 0.01$). These differences are in line with the hypotheses of this current study and previous research such as Blomme et al. (2009). As a result of the differences between first-year students and higher year students, the multiple regression was performed again without first-year students. The outcome of this supplementary regression analysis shows only two significant predictors of the dependent variable: expected position level ($B = 0.08, p < 0.05$) and growth opportunities ($B = 0.18, p < 0.01$).

Discussion

Theoretical implications

This study examined how hospitality management students' background variables (prior industry experience, study year), their preference for person-organisation fit factors (organisation size, culture, reputation) and preference for person-job fit factors (engaging work content, growth opportunities and salary) predicted their intention to enter employment in the industry on graduation. There are several key findings from this study that are of theoretical importance. First, this study has shown that study year is negatively related to students' intention to enter employment in the industry. This finding builds on Blomme et al.'s (2009) descriptive results showing that first-year students tend to have overly positive expectations regarding employment in the industry. As students progress through the educational programme, their knowledge and expectations of employment in the industry are more solidly and accurately shaped by the curriculum, which is a quintessential aspect of hospitality management education (Min et al., 2016). While the finding that lower year students reported higher intention to enter the industry may be critically viewed by some as hospitality educators' failure to attract and retain talent for the industry, it may also be hailed by others as success on the part of hospitality educators in properly educating or informing students and guiding them into a field of employment that they truly desire.

Second, the findings of this study have shown that students who prefer to work with large organisations are more likely to enter employment in the hospitality industry. As the annual YHS hospitality employer rankings of recent years (Lor & Kall, 2018; Hsu & Hilterbrand, 2019) have shown, large upper-upscales properties appear to be the most favoured by hospitality students and graduates. Those hospitality students who want to work in large organisations are indeed more likely to choose to enter employment in the industry. A potential explanation for this tendency may lie in another finding revealed by this study: growth opportunities. That is, a key explanatory mechanism which may clarify why large hotels are more attractive for hospitality students and graduates is that in such organisations there are more growth and development opportunities, which represent something that students and graduates value greatly

(Brown et al., 2014). A supplementary post-hoc mediation test shows that students' preference for growth mediates the positive relationship between organisation size and intention to enter the industry (direct effect of organisation size on dependent variable $\gamma = 0.08, p < 0.05$; direct effect of organisation size on growth opportunity $\gamma = 0.07, p < 0.05$; effect of organisation size on dependent variable with growth opportunities controlled for $\gamma = 0.05, ns$). In effect, the findings of this study not only demonstrate a positive relationship between students' preference to work in a large organisation and their tendency to join the industry, but also offer a potential explanation for why this positive relationship exists, i.e. employees' desire to facilitate career development and growth.

Third, those students who desire engaging job content are shown to be more likely to enter employment in the hospitality industry on graduation. This finding is in line with earlier investigations on hospitality students' perceptions and expectations regarding employment in the hospitality industry (Richardson, 2008; 2009; Blomme et al., 2009) which have reported that students attach great importance to the opportunity to fully use their skills and competencies in their work. The finding of this study in this respect is also consistent with research and theory on person-job fit (e.g. Kristof-Brown, 2000; Verquer et al., 2003; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Venkatesh et al., 2017) which indicate that engaging job content stimulate employees' interests in applying for and staying committed to the job.

Fourth, the overall pattern of findings indicates that growth opportunities are of crucial importance for students when deciding whether or not to enter employment in the hospitality industry on graduation. This finding is in line with much prior research which has consistently shown that growth and advancement opportunities are key in attracting, motivating and retaining talent in the hospitality industry (Richardson, 2008; 2009; Blomme et al., 2009; Brown et al., 2014; Lor & Kall, 2018; Hsu & Hilterbrand, 2019). The importance of growth and advancement opportunities is further demonstrated in the supplementary analyses where the findings show that, for higher study year students, growth opportunities is the only study variable which significantly predicts students' intention to enter the industry. In other words, when the regression analyses are performed with first-year students excluded, study year, organisation size and engaging work content lose their predictive power and only growth opportunities remain significant. These supplementary findings present two revelations: that there are meaningful variations among students of different study years, and that growth opportunities are of key importance in predicting students' intention to enter the industry.

Limitations and future research

The findings of this study ought to be viewed in light of a number of limitations, and future researchers may consider a number of promising further research avenues. First, this study relied on data collected from just one hospitality management school and, therefore, its findings and conclusions may not fully generalise to hotel management schools and students in other geographical locations. Researchers are encouraged to replicate the key findings of this study in other hospitality management institutes to better gauge the generalisability of this study.

Second, the dependent variable of this study – the intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry is, by definition,

not actual behaviour. In other words, there might be a difference between those who indicate they would likely enter the industry and those who actually do so. The potential difference between behavioural intention and actual behaviour is a widely recognised issue in organisational research (e.g. Ajzen, 1991; Hwang et al., 2014; Walsh et al., 2015; Li et al., 2019) in that often the actual behaviour that is being studied is hard to empirically and directly measure. As a result, researchers rely on measures of specific behavioural intentions instead of actual behaviours for the purpose of their studies (i.e. employee turnover intention, or propensity instead of actual turnover behaviour). Future research should therefore examine if students' intention to enter employment in the hospitality industry actually leads to employment in the industry by using a longitudinal research design which tracks and monitors hospitality students' and graduates' career decisions and behaviours.

Third, a number of variables were measured with single items. This was done for two main reasons: such single items were based on prior hospitality research, and the variables being measured represented singular and concrete perceptions. For instance, students' preference for working in large organisations was measured by adopting statements used in previous YHS employer ranking surveys. Furthermore, besides such single-item statements being anchored in previous hospitality research, the preferences or perceptions measured by these single items are conceptually clear and unidimensional. As such, the use of single items to measure these preferences in this study is to some extent justifiable (Kwon & Trail, 2005; Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007; 2009). However, we recognise that this issue is a potential limitation of the study and recommend that future researchers develop and use multiple-item scales to measure such variables for reliability and fit indices to be calculated.

Conclusions and managerial implications

This study examined three categories of predictors of hospitality management students' intention to enter employment in the industry on graduation – background control variables, organisation-specific preferences and job-specific preferences. The findings show that study year negatively predicts, while preference for large organisations, engaging work content and growth opportunities positively predict students' intention to enter the industry. Supplementary analyses further reveal that among higher study year students, growth opportunities are the most crucial predictor for intention to enter the industry, followed by expected position level. The findings of this study could aid hospitality enterprises to better attract and hire graduates as well as guide hospitality educators to adjust student selection processes and curricular design.

The findings of this study have a number of managerial implications for hospitality enterprises and for hospitality educators. For hospitality enterprises, it would be beneficial if they effectively highlight two specific elements in their recruiting processes: (1) that they provide engaging work content which affords employees the opportunity to fully use their skills and competencies in the conduct of their work; and (2) that they offer ample opportunities for growth and development. This study has found that these two factors positively predict hospitality management students' intention to join the industry. Consequently, hospitality enterprises, when they can strongly and effectively communicate these

factors to hospitality students during recruitment events such as job fairs or campus presentations, should be better able to elicit students' intention to work with them. Among the three meaningful predictors that this study has identified, growth opportunities is especially important. This is evidenced by not only the outcomes of the hypotheses testing, but also by the supplementary regression analyses and mediation analyses. As a consequence, hotels and other hospitality enterprises ought to pay particular attention to providing and highlighting growth and advancement opportunities when recruiting hospitality students. Many international hotel groups are already doing this. Hilton's Elevator Program, InterContinental Hotel Group's Future Leaders Program and Marriott's Voyage Program are all designed to facilitate accelerated career development and advancement and these programmes are effectively targeting hospitality management students and graduates as well as other young talent who are interested in a hospitality career. These programmes often work in conjunction with traineeships and internships, which could also have great potential impact on students' career intentions (Losekoot et al., 2018). By designing talent-recruitment programmes and internship experiences that involve engaging work content and communicate strong advancement opportunities, hospitality enterprises can better elicit graduates' intention to join and pursue a long-term career with the hospitality industry.

Smaller-sized hospitality enterprises can also benefit from the findings of this study. Small hotels typically do not have extensive career development programmes like The Elevator Program or The Future Leaders Program as referenced above. Research also indicates that small hotels normally do not have a full HR department and that recruitment and selection are generally performed in a manner that is as cost efficient as possible, relying primarily on channels or platforms that do not require substantial financial resources (Young-Thelin & Boluk, 2012). While these practices are understandable, they may not be optimal for attracting high-quality hospitality management students and graduates. Smaller-sized hospitality enterprises may consider having one designated employee, either full-time or part-time, to be solely responsible for recruitment. They should take advantage of the small size of the company and the lack of rigid hierarchical organisational structure to design and offer truly engaging work tasks and growth opportunities for staff. They must communicate these factors clearly and effectively in job descriptions or vacancies and on social media platforms. In this way, smaller-sized hospitality enterprises could become more attractive to hospitality management students and graduates even though they lack the resources of large hotel groups.

Another potential practical implication for hotels and hospitality enterprises, large or small, in terms of recruiting and attracting talent, is to look beyond hospitality management schools. This may sound counterintuitive, but the empirical facts are that study year negatively predicted students' intention to enter the industry (H1b), and many hospitality management graduates choose to go into other fields instead of hospitality (Blomme et al., 2009; Lor & Kall, 2018; Hsu & Hilterbrand, 2019). Consequently, hotels and hospitality enterprises should not rely solely on the hope of attracting talent only from hotel management schools. They ought to broaden their recruitment efforts to also focus on other types of business management schools and management courses in universities and colleges

which do not exclusively focus on hotel management – a point that Baum (2019) also makes. Talented employees and managers can come from all backgrounds.

For hospitality educators, the findings of this study have practical implications and also raise a number of questions. This study shows that lower year students have more positive expectations of employment in the hospitality industry, which is fully consistent with Blomme et al.'s (2009) research findings. As students progress through the educational programme, their knowledge of the industry becomes more accurate and their expectations about employment in the industry become more realistic and less positive. As a result, higher study year students are less inclined to enter employment in the industry. The question then becomes "what should hospitality educators do about this?". If the goal of the educators is to produce a higher throughput rate, so to speak, and to encourage more students to enter employment in the hospitality industry on graduation, hospitality educational institutions ought to consider selecting students with greater experience in the industry, more knowledge of the industry and a strong preference for engaging work and growth opportunities, as these students are more likely to consider entering the industry after their studies.

On the other hand, one might have different interpretations of this study's findings. They might not view the fact that higher year students are less inclined to join the industry as a failure on the part of the educator. Some young students are potentially interested in a hospitality career, so they enrol in a hospitality management programme, and through studying hospitality management, they learn more about the industry and ultimately make an informed decision for themselves as to whether or not to work in this industry. That could be considered an illustration of the fact that the curricular and the educational programme served their purpose well. Hospitality graduates who do not enter the hospitality industry tend to go into related industries such as luxury retailing, banking, fashion, leisure and travel (Lor & Kall, 2018; Hsu & Hilterbrand, 2019). Some hospitality management institutions accept and embrace this diversification effect, which is partially evidenced by many hospitality courses being offered jointly with other disciplines (e.g. hospitality and event management, hotel and tourism management, school of hospitality and tourism management, etc.). There are also recent examples of established hotel schools changing their names from "hotel school" to "hospitality business school", reflecting a general business management education with a specialised focus on hospitality competencies and skills.

Both approaches are legitimate and both may be necessary. Hospitality educators ought to consider adjusting student selection and curriculum to generate higher throughput rates and produce more talent for the industry. Educators should also accept and facilitate students' own interests and help them pursue the career they desire, be it in hospitality or any related fields in which hospitality competencies and skills are valued and welcomed. Finally, there is little research about whether hospitality graduates who initially choose not to enter the hospitality industry perhaps join it at a later stage in their careers.

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