

# Status and scope of project management in the hospitality industry

Eduardo Vicente Rengel Jara, Jackson Wayne Babb and  
Timothy Marshall Flohr  
*Kemmons Wilson School of Hospitality and Resort Management,  
University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee, USA*

## Abstract

**Purpose** – Project management is an essential skill in the hospitality organization that is only becoming more important (Tereso *et al.*, 2019). Bridging the gap between academia and industry is achievable by experiential learning or providing students with curriculum that gives them hands-on access to real-world industry research projects that attempt to solve real-world industry issues (Steed and Schwer, 2003). The purpose of this paper is to understand the scope of project management curriculum in universities' hospitality programs, to understand the scope of project management skill requirements in hospitality firms and to narrow the disconnect between project management in academia and in hospitality firms.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study used a mixed method approach. On the side of academia, a quantitative collection method was used to gauge which universities offered a project management course, how many universities offer these courses and how many project management courses each university had. On the side of industry, a survey was administered to industry professionals in senior management positions. It was a quantitative survey designed to gauge the importance of having project management as part of university curriculum. The aim was to show what was expected to be a disconnect between the two sides – academia and industry. A total of 57 responses were collected. Out of them 49 were usable. The Human Subjects consisted solely of two populations: individuals who worked in the hospitality industry. This accounted for 12 of the responses; individuals who worked in academia – more specifically in higher education at schools that offer Hospitality Management curriculum. This accounted for 37 of the responses. The subjects were identified and recruited through the professional networking site LinkedIn (for subjects that were industry professionals) and through both LinkedIn and American Hotel Lodging and Educational Institute databases for the subjects in academia. There were no direct potential benefits to the subject. The potential societal benefits of the study were the advancement of knowledge within the disciplines of both Hospitality Management and Project Management. The authors used the University of Memphis' Qualtrics system and changed settings to anonymize responses so IP addresses would not be collected. The Qualtrics' default is to collect IP addresses and GPS coordinates of those who responded. By setting the survey to anonymized responses the investigators were not able to collect this identifiable information. This information was included in the confidentiality, methods/procedures and in any other necessary sections/documents noting that the investigators would set Qualtrics to anonymize responses.

**Findings** – *H1* was supported. The findings showed that most colleges and universities did not require project management classes for degree completion. Preliminary research showed that of 68 of the top hospitality programs in the world that were researched, only 7.5 percent required taking project management centric courses in order to graduate (College Choice, 2019; The Best Schools, 2019; Top Universities, 2018). In total, 43.2 percent of respondents answered "yes" when asked if their school offers courses in project management based on this definition of project management: "A project is temporary in that it has a defined beginning and end in time, and therefore the defined scope and resources. And a project is unique in that it is not a routine operation, but a specific set of operations designed to accomplish a singular goal. A project team often includes people who do not usually work together – sometimes from different organizations and across multiple geographies. Project management, then, is the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet the project requirement" (Project Management Institute) (See Table A1). Of 43.2 percent that answered yes, 64.3 percent said that the courses were required for graduation (See Table AII). Meaning, only 27.8 percent of schools surveyed offered and required completing project management courses for graduation.



It should be noted that this number may be lower as bias may have played a factor. It is evident that hospitality programs understand the importance of project management because 85.7 percent of the colleges and universities surveyed are teaching project management concepts in courses that are not project management centric, like Meeting and Event Planning (See Table AIII). *H2* was supported. Only 9.1 percent of respondents believed that project management skills are not at all important to line level employees. Most, 54.6 percent, believed that project management skills are important to some extent for line level employees. In total, 9.1 percent believed that project management skills are not at all important for supervisory level employees; 27.3 percent believed they are needed to some extent and 36.4 percent believed they are needed to a moderate extent. As for management level employees, it was found that 63.6 percent believed project management skills were needed to a great extent. For director level employees, 63.6 percent believed project management skills are necessary. Finally, 72.7 percent of respondents believed project management skills are necessary for both VP level employees and executive leadership (See Table AIV). It should be noted that one person did not believe themselves qualified to answer questions regarding project management within their organization. More than half of respondents said that project management skills are used to a great extent within their organization. *H3* was not supported. Both hospitality schools and hospitality companies agreed that project management skills have some level of importance in academia and in industry – most believed the skills were very important at both junctions (See Tables AV and AVI). However, in the preliminary research the authors found that 55 percent of the top 111 hospitality companies had project management positions, meaning that there was a potential need for project management courses in colleges and universities (Ranker, 2019). As stated earlier, only 7.5 percent of the top 68 colleges and universities required project management courses to be completed upon graduation. So, the discrepancy lies within the vastly different percentages between project management positions within companies and project management courses within schools.

**Research limitations/implications** – The data provided strong evidence that supported the idea that project management is not required in hospitality programs upon completion. This opens new avenues to research the reasons behind schools not offering project management courses or making it a requirement for degree completion. On the other hand, project management skills are considered to be needed by hospitality managers. This provides valuable information for future studies that look to close the gap between academia and industry. The results indicated that project management is important for hospitality companies and schools, but the lack of project management education in colleges and universities is evident. The results of this study provided good news to students that aim to work in hospitality companies, since they can improve their project management skills and encourage their programs to stay updated with the industry needs so that they can succeed in their professional lives. Though this was an exploratory study of the project management discipline within the hospitality industry – with a limited sample size – the data clearly justified that there is room for additional data collection and research in this area of study.

**Practical implications** – The results show that there is a disconnect between project management curriculum in schools and project management skill demand in the hospitality industry. The research should encourage schools to invest appropriate resources into required project management curriculum. The hospitality industry is vast in the types of businesses that fall under it. Project management is one skill set that can be useful across most of the different businesses in the hospitality industry. From a practical standpoint, providing students with a solid background in the project management discipline provides them an advantage in the highly competitive hospitality industry. It accomplishes this by providing the students with in-demand knowledge and competencies that are both universally accepted and highly regarded by hospitality management companies as a skill set that is widely used in the industry.

**Social implications** – There were limitations to this study. Some pieces may be improved in future research. The Qualtrics survey could have been reduced in number and order of questions for a better interaction and results. The use of the Qualtrics database might be helpful to reach a bigger population. Potential steps could be taken to reduce bias that may play a factor in the responses. For example, some respondents may have claimed that their schools offer project management curriculum when in fact they do not, or they do not know to what extent.

**Originality/value** – Project management is an essential skill in the hospitality organization that is only becoming more important (Tereso *et al.*, 2019). Bridging the gap between academia and industry is achievable through experiential learning or providing students with curriculum that gives them hands-on access to real-world industry research projects that attempt to solve real-world industry issues (Steed and Schwer, 2003). Most graduate level curriculum at universities was found to hone skills like written and oral communications, problem solving and decision making, organization, time management and cost control (Steed and Schwer, 2003). It has been suggested that universities add project management curriculum and experiential learning to their programs for a more streamlined transition from academia to industry (Steed and Schwer, 2003). Existing research on this subject is a bit dated, so the objectives were: to understand the scope of project management curriculum in universities' hospitality programs; to understand the scope of project management skill requirements in hospitality firms; to narrow the disconnect between project management in academia and in hospitality firms.

**Keywords** Hospitality industry, Project management, University, College, Project

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

It is paramount that colleges and universities provide classes and curriculum that teach the necessary skills students need to succeed in their respective industries (Dressler *et al.*, 2011). The National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) has categorized the four essential learning skills for global industries (Dressler *et al.*, 2011). They are integrative learning, knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world, intellectual practical skills, and personal and social responsibility (Dressler *et al.*, 2011). Universities now must ensure that their curriculum is fostering an environment that promotes these skills and one way to do this is through experiential learning (Dressler *et al.*, 2011).

Project management is an essential skill in the hospitality organization that is only becoming more important (Tereso *et al.*, 2019). Bridging the gap between academia and industry is achievable through experiential learning or providing students with curriculum that gives them hands-on access to real-world industry research projects that attempt to solve real-world industry issues (Steed and Schwer, 2003). Most graduate level curriculum at universities was found to hone skills like written and oral communications, problem solving and decision making, organization, time management and cost control (Steed and Schwer, 2003). It has been suggested that universities add project management curriculum and experiential learning to their programs for a more streamlined transition from academia to industry (Steed and Schwer, 2003). Existing research on this subject is a bit dated, so our objectives were:

- (1) To understand the scope of project management curriculum in universities' hospitality programs.
- (2) To understand the scope of project management skill requirements in hospitality firms.
- (3) To narrow the disconnect between project management in academia and in hospitality firms.

## 2. Literature review

Providing relevant education is a concern that has been growing in the last few decades (Dressler *et al.*, 2011). In the 1990s, governmental documents were created in different countries with the aim of providing a guideline to educational institutions about the skills required by the hospitality industry (Dressler *et al.*, 2011). The Association of American Colleges and Universities created the LEAP in 2006 to address the issue of how students should be prepared in college in order to thrive in today's world (Dressler *et al.*, 2011).

According to Dressler, Cedercreutz and Pacheco in their research, Strengthening Curriculum it is through Student Learning Outcome Assessment in Experiential Learning, it is stated that the last updated study from LEAP was in 2008 (2013). As a result, there has been an 11-year gap in updating academia about the requirements in the hospitality industry (Dressler *et al.*, 2011). This lack of communication resulted in dated curriculum and a lack of courses about project management and the skills that firms require nowadays. Thus, we propose:

- H1.* Project management curriculum in most colleges' and universities' hospitality programs will not be required for hospitality degree completion.

Project management is required by different organizations, and it does not have a global definition (Tereso *et al.*, 2019). Some main characteristics of it are uniqueness, that is understood as managing complex activities; qualitative and quantitative objectives, and temporary that is described as a start and finish time (Tereso *et al.*, 2019). The hospitality industry is in constant evolution and industry leaders need to approach the global market strategically (Nath and Raheja, 2001). Therefore, it requires staff with a

diverse set of competencies. According to Nath and Raheja, project management is a functional competency that is required within the hospitality firms (Nath and Raheja, 2001). Thus, we propose:

*H2.* Hospitality managers deem project management skills as needed in most work levels of the hospitality industry.

There is a need to find a balance between what is being taught in academia and what is required in hospitality firms (Steed and Schwer, 2003). Some research has been executed in order to streamline hospitality academia and hospitality firms. However, even if some problems have been solved in the hospitality industry, there is still a lack of competencies needed by hospitality firms in academic curriculums, specifically project management (Steed and Schwer, 2003). In order to complete the learning cycle and streamline universities' hospitality program curriculum and hospitality firms' requirements, it is necessary to maintain a good relationship between both and constantly research the needs of firms in order to keep both in balance (Steed and Schwer, 2003). Thus, we propose:

*H3.* Hospitality companies will view project management skills as more important in industry than hospitality schools view project management skills in academia.

### **3. Methodology**

The study used a mixed method approach. On the side of academia, a quantitative collection method was used to gauge which universities offered a project management course, how many universities offer these courses and how many project management courses each university had. On the side of industry, a survey was administered to industry professionals in senior management positions. It was a quantitative survey designed to gauge the importance of having project management as part of university curriculum. The aim was to show what was expected to be a disconnect between the two sides – academia and industry.

A total of 57 responses were collected. Out of them, 49 were usable. The Human Subjects consisted solely of two populations:

- (1) Individuals who worked in the hospitality industry. This accounted for 12 of the responses.
- (2) Individuals who worked in academia – more specifically in higher education at schools that offer Hospitality Management curriculum. This accounted for 37 of the responses.

The subjects were identified and recruited through the professional networking site LinkedIn (for subjects that were industry professionals) and through both LinkedIn and American Hotel Lodging and Educational Institute databases for the subjects in academia:

- (1) There were no direct potential benefits to the subject.
- (2) The potential societal benefits of the study were the advancement of knowledge within the disciplines of both Hospitality Management and Project Management.

We used the University of Memphis' Qualtrics system and changed settings to anonymize responses so IP addresses would not be collected. The Qualtrics' default is to collect IP addresses and GPS coordinates of those who responded. By setting the survey to anonymized responses the investigators were not able to collect this identifiable information. This information was included in the confidentiality, methods/procedures and in any other necessary sections/documents noting that the investigators would set Qualtrics to anonymize responses.

#### 4. Results

*H1* was supported. Our findings showed that most colleges and universities did not require project management classes for degree completion. Preliminary research showed that of 68 of the top hospitality programs in the world that were researched, only 7.5 percent required taking project management centric courses in order to graduate (College Choice, 2019; The Best Schools, 2019; Top Universities, 2018). In total, 43.2 percent of respondents answered “yes” when asked if their school offers courses in project management based on this definition of project management: “A project is temporary in that it has a defined beginning and end in time, and therefore the defined scope and resources. And a project is unique in that it is not a routine operation, but a specific set of operations designed to accomplish a singular goal. A project team often includes people who do not usually work together – sometimes from different organizations and across multiple geographies. Project management, then, is the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet the project requirement” (Project Management Institute) (See Table AI). Of 43.2 percent that answered yes, 64.3 percent said that the courses were required for graduation (See Table AII). Meaning, only 27.8 percent of schools surveyed offered and required completing project management courses for graduation. It should be noted that this number may be lower as bias may have played a factor. It is evident that hospitality programs understand the importance of project management because 85.7 percent of the colleges and universities surveyed are teaching project management concepts in courses that are not project management centric, like Meeting and Event Planning (See Table AIII).

*H2* was supported. Only 9.1 percent of respondents believed that project management skills are not at all important to line level employees. Most, 54.6 percent, believed that project management skills are important to some extent for line level employees. 9.1 percent believed that project management skills are not at all important for supervisory level employees. In total, 27.3 percent believed they are needed to some extent and 36.4 percent believed they are needed to a moderate extent. As for management level employees, it was found that 63.6 percent believed project management skills were needed to a great extent. For director level employees, 63.6 percent believed project management skills are necessary. Finally, 72.7 percent of respondents believed project management skills are necessary for both VP level employees and executive leadership (See Table AIV). It should be noted that one person did not believe themselves qualified to answer questions regarding project management within their organization. More than half of respondents said that project management skills are used to a great extent within their organization.

*H3* was not supported. Both hospitality schools and hospitality companies agreed that project management skills have some level of importance in academia and in industry – most believed the skills were very important at both junctions (See Tables AV and AVI). However, in our preliminary research we found that 55 percent of the top 111 hospitality companies had project management positions, meaning that there was a potential need for project management courses in colleges and universities (Ranker, 2019). As stated earlier, only 7.5 percent of the top 68 colleges and universities required project management courses to be completed upon graduation. So, the discrepancy lies within the vastly different percentages between project management positions within companies and project management courses within schools.

#### 5. Conclusion

The results found in this research are noteworthy in terms of theory and practice.

##### 5.1 Academic implications

The data provided strong evidence that supported the idea that project management is not required in hospitality programs upon completion. This opens new avenues to research the reasons behind schools not offering project management courses or making it a requirement

for degree completion. On the other hand, project management skills are considered to be needed by hospitality managers. This provides valuable information for future studies that look to close the gap between academia and industry. The results indicated that project management is important for hospitality companies and schools, but the lack of project management education in colleges and universities is evident. The results of this study provided good news to students that aim to work in hospitality companies, since they can improve their project management skills and encourage their programs to stay updated with the industry needs so that they can succeed in their professional lives. Though this was an exploratory study of the project management discipline within the hospitality industry – with a limited sample size – the data clearly justified that there is room for additional data collection and research in this area of study.

### 5.2 Practical implications

The results show that there is a disconnect between project management curriculum in schools and project management skill demand in the hospitality industry. The research should encourage schools to invest appropriate resources into required project management curriculum. The hospitality industry is vast in the types of businesses that fall under it. Project management is one skill set that can be useful across most of the different businesses in the hospitality industry. From a practical standpoint, providing students with a solid background in the project management discipline provides them an advantage in the highly competitive hospitality industry. It accomplishes this by providing the students with in-demand knowledge and competencies that are both universally accepted and highly regarded by hospitality management companies as a skill set that is widely used in the industry.

### 5.3 Limitations

There were limitations to this study. Some pieces may be improved in future research. The Qualtrics survey could have been reduced in number and order of questions for a better interaction and results. The use of the Qualtrics database might be helpful to reach a bigger population. Potential steps could be taken to reduce bias that may play a factor in the responses. For example, some respondents may have claimed that their schools offer project management curriculum when in fact they do not, or they do not know to what extent.

## References

- College Choice (2019), “Best hospitality management degrees”, available at: [www.collegechoice.net/rankings/best-hospitality-management-degrees/](http://www.collegechoice.net/rankings/best-hospitality-management-degrees/) (accessed March 13, 2019).
- Dressler, S., Cerdercreutz, K. and Pacheco, A. (2011), “Strengthening curriculum through student learning outcome assessment in experiential learning”, *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, Vol. 23, doi: 10.1080/10963758.2011.10697005.
- Nath, R. and Raheja, R. (2001), “Competencies in hospitality industry”, *Journal of Services Research*, Vol. 1 No. 1, p. 25, available at: <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.memphis.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=9893635&site=ehost-live> (accessed March 3, 2019).
- Ranker (2019), “Ranker”, List of Hospitality Companies, March 1, available at: [www.ranker.com/list/hospitality-companies/reference](http://www.ranker.com/list/hospitality-companies/reference) (accessed March 19, 2019).
- Steed, E. and Schwer, K. (2003), “Executive committee skills and completing the learning cycle in hospitality education”, *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 43-50, doi: 10.1080/10963758.2003.10696759.
- Tereso, A., Ribeiro, P., Fernandes, G., Loureiro, I. and Ferreira, M. (2019), “Project management practices in private organizations”, *Project Management Journal*, Vol. 50 No. 1, pp. 6-22, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/8756972818810966>

The Best Schools (2019), "The 30 best hospitality programs in the United States", February 7, available at: <https://thebestschools.org/rankings/best-hospitality-degree-programs/> (accessed March 3, 2019).

Top Universities (2018), "World university rankings hospitality & leisure management", available at: [www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/university-subject-rankings/2018/hospitality-leisure-management](http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/university-subject-rankings/2018/hospitality-leisure-management) (accessed February 24, 2019).

### Further reading

Project Management Institute (2019), "What is project management?", available at: [www.pmi.org/about/learn-about-pmi/what-is-project-management](http://www.pmi.org/about/learn-about-pmi/what-is-project-management)

## Appendix

### Definition of project management

A project is temporary in that it has a defined beginning and end in time, and therefore defined scope and resources.

And a project is unique in that it is not a routine operation, but a specific set of operations designed to accomplish a singular goal. So a project team often includes people who do not usually work together – sometimes from different organizations and across multiple geographies.

Project management, then, is the application of knowledge, skills, tools and techniques to project activities to meet the project requirements.

**Table AI.**

Based on the above definition (from the Project Management Institute), does your school offer courses in Project Management?

No.	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	43.24	16
2	No	56.76	21
	Total	100	37

**Table AII.**

Is the project management class a required or elective course within your program?

No.	Answer	%	Count
1	Required	64.28	9
2	Elective	35.72	5
	Total	100	14

**Table AIII.**

Do you teach project management concepts in classes that are not project-management centric?

No.	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	85.71	12
2	No	14.29	2
	Total	100	14

No.	Field	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Variance	Count
1	Line level employees	1	4	2.64	0.77	0.6	11
2	Supervisory level employees	1	5	3.73	1.14	1.29	11
3	Management level employees	2	5	4.36	0.98	0.96	11
4	Director level employees	4	5	4.64	0.48	0.23	11
5	VP level employees	4	5	4.73	0.45	0.2	11
6	Executive leadership	4	5	4.73	0.45	0.2	11

No.	Question	Not at all		To a small extent		To some extent		To a moderate extent		To a great extent		Total
		%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	
1	Line level employees	9.09	1	27.27	3	54.55	6	9.09	1	0.00	0	11
2	Supervisory level employees	9.09	1	0.00	0	27.27	3	36.36	4	27.27	3	11
3	Management level employees	0.00	0	9.09	1	9.09	1	18.18	2	63.64	7	11
4	Director level employees	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	36.36	4	63.64	7	11
5	VP level employees	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	27.27	3	72.73	8	11
6	Executive leadership	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	27.27	3	72.73	8	11

**Table AIV.**  
At what level are project management skills needed at the following work levels?

No.	Answer	%	Count
1	Extremely important	37.74	20
2	Very important	49.06	26
3	Moderately important	13.21	7
4	Slightly important	0.00	0
5	Not at all important	0.00	0
	Total		53

**Table AV.**  
How important do you think project management skills are within the hospitality industry?

No.	Answer	%	Count
1	Extremely important	28.30	15
2	Very important	49.06	26
3	Moderately important	18.87	10
4	Slightly important	3.77	2
5	Not at all important	0.00	0
	Total		53

**Table AVI.**  
How important do you think project management is to students in hospitality schools?

**Corresponding author**

Timothy Marshall Flohr can be contacted at: [timothy.flohr@memphis.edu](mailto:timothy.flohr@memphis.edu)

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

[www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm](http://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm)

Or contact us for further details: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)