

Hospitality Higher Education Talent Management Programme, STEP: A Stepping-Stone to Develop Future Hospitality Leaders

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Abstract: The hospitality industry has shown remarkable growth in the Asia Pacific region. As the industry grows, it requires human capital and skills to cater to the growing market. Out of 2023,338 million jobs in tourism worldwide, two-thirds of them alone are in Asia. The need for skilled employees to address this growth has become even more important in the competitive global environment. Higher education institutions are often considered unable to prepare students for future employment, and leadership positions in the tourism industry. Recently, several initiatives have been developed to bridge the gap between academia and industry. This paper reviews an employment programme developed in Malaysia by a private university. The Student Employability Programme (STEP) was created in partnership with global hotel groups. STEP programme is a strategy to link students and engage them in the recruitment, retention and talent management within hospitality organizations. This paper first reviews the literature, and then discusses the implementation of the STEP programme since its inception in 2011 based on the interview of STEP stakeholders (faculty, students and industry partners). The findings show positive feedback emphasizing the commitment and implementation of an integrated and strategic approach to human resource management. Industry and faculty share the belief that human resource management is the primary source of competitive advantage and an essential asset to decrease shortage of supply of manpower. Developing the awareness of value of such employment programmes would be beneficial to alleviate the current mismatch between graduates capabilities and industry expectations. However the capacity to innovate and develop original programmes of employment of future graduate remains the exception rather than the norm.

Key words: Graduate employability, hospitality employees, human resource management, industry Engagement, STEP, Talent Management.

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Introduction

Educational institutions play a significant role in preparing the hospitality students before they join the work force. Leading hospitality jobs require technical and operational skills as well as management skills. The educational knowledge and practices provided in the institutions are

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simply not enough to handle the real world situations. This gives rise to the necessity to develop employment programmes to bridge the gap between graduates and the industry. Cooper (2002) argued that curriculum studies in tourism are not yet well established, and addressed the tension between educators and the tourism industry. Therefore the hospitality institutions are required to interact with industry players to work together in selecting and grooming qualified potential candidates and develop employability among those students. Worldwide, tourism directly supported 100,894,000 jobs (3.4% of total employment in 2013). This figure is expected to rise by 2.0% per annum to 126,257,000 jobs in 2024 or 3.7% of total employment (WTTC, 2014). Furthermore, tourists arrival to ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) increased by more than 10% at 81 million as the region continued to lure visitors with its landscapes, attractions, rich culture and history (ASEAN, 2013). The World Travel and Tourism Council (2014) forecasts that tourism will rise by 5.1% per annum over the next ten years to USD1, 310.9 billion in 2024 (4.9% of total). Asia Pacific will lead global tourism growth for the next decade with total tourism induced contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increasing at 6.3% per annum compared to the global average of 4.3% (UNWTO, 2014). The pressure is particularly acute in South-East Asia with a shortage of qualified professionals, especially in the middle management positions. Education and skills development play an important role in shaping the region's recovery, competitiveness and long-term development (ILO, 2010). The prosperity of the region depends on the ability of workers and enterprises to adapt to changing markets and to benefit from innovations and investments in new technologies, clean energy, health and infrastructure.

Higher Education Institutions (HEI) have been developing mechanisms to engage the hospitality and tourism industry to prepare students to be quickly employable upon graduation. Most of institutions include internship programmes, industry talks, seminars and research projects related to real life issues. Some institutions also refer to Industry Advisory Panels (IAPs) where the industry partners become important stakeholders in the programmes offered by the universities concerned. However, fast-changing industry trends and high expectations towards hospitality graduates point to the need for a stronger longitudinal involvement between the university, the students and the tourism industry throughout the duration of the undergraduate programmes in hospitality.

This paper examines an innovation developed by a private university from Malaysia through a specific employment programme. This '*Student Employment Programme*' (STEP) has been instrumental in creating an enhanced relationship between students, university and the industry in 2011. Since 2014 the first groups of students have graduated and a review of the programme's outcomes and achievements seems timely. This paper aims to review the literature on the pedagogical and philosophical expectations from hospitality education. It also looks at the employability of graduates and the notion of talent management that link the academic environment to the industry. It also discusses changing trends in the industry and the challenges particular to the ASEAN region. It then reviews the process of the STEP programme and the feedbacks from its stakeholders.

Review of the Literature

In the academic literature, discussion of vocational higher education in hospitality falls into three overlapping areas, namely: (a) the underlying approaches to vocational education (philosophical, ideological); (b) the content or subject matter of the courses; and (c) the stakehold-

ers or markets for whom the course is designed (Morgan, 2004). The graduate employability issues are generally addressed with alumni studies rather than prior to students' graduation. A review of the technical education expectations helps to understand this situation.

Hospitality Education Expectations

Much of the literature emphasizes on hospitality courses' curriculum which includes 'whole educational experience packaged as a degree programme' and which may include knowledge, skills, assessment, learning experiences and so on (Tribe, 2002). The importance of embedding vocational training on educational programmes was analysed by Dredge, Benckendorff, Day, Gross, Walo, Weeks and Whitelaw (2012). They highlighted that promoting a balance between satisfying the demands of business and those required to operate within the wider tourism world was essential for students' employability. Beaven and Wright (2006) noticed that specialist vocational courses exist to provide students with training in preparation for management work in the field, and therefore student employability is a key concern. The goal is to produce graduates who are ready to secure work of a suitable level within a reasonable time after graduation, and who are equipped to keep the post and develop within their chosen career. Several authors have been calling for this balance in education for some time (Baum, 2005; Inui, Wheeler, & Lankford, 2006b) but there remains considerable challenges in terms of defining programme content, modes of delivery, appropriate pedagogies, skills and graduate capabilities (Tribe, 2000). Some argue the importance of preparing students to take on stewardship roles in the broader processes of societal change, while arguing the need for skilled hospitality management practitioners who can manage change in positive ways (Jamal, 2004; Morgan, 2004). The curriculum should therefore look beyond technical and business education and embrace a broader understanding of education (Dredge *et al.*, 2012). In this aspect, it is the role of the HEIs to produce qualified employees for the industry, and Morgan (2004) suggests going beyond vocational education. He states that there is a need for degree-level programmes that enable students to think critically about the future of the industry, as well as to train them for required management skills and knowledge.

Beyond the Traditional View of Employability Assessed by Technical and Operational Skills

As a result of the perceived need for trained workers in Europe, the hospitality curriculum has been dominated by a focus on specific occupational skills while there has been a significant development of these programmes with the growth of tourism (Inui *et al.*, 2006b). Busby (2003) noted that internships and apprenticeships in the industry, as well as academic subjects closely related to specific needs in the field (such as marketing, finance, management and human resources) improve student development and competence, simultaneously creating stronger connections between higher education institutions and the industry. But this preparation does not necessarily translate into long-term career prospects. According to Busby (2001) the relatively high employment rate of tourism graduates can be attributed to acquisition of useful skills and practical experience in the industry as a result of curriculum, although the recruitment can be made with low wages and that would include hospitality graduates in the 'working poor' category. This career prospect seems to explain the high turnover and career switch amongst demotivated hospitality graduates. The gap between technical and operational skills

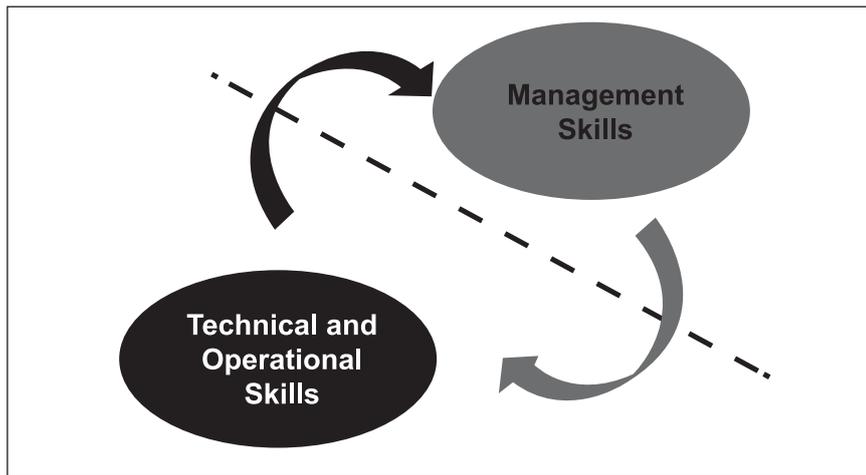


Figure 1. Education to link management and technical skills

and management skills in hospitality education might be the cause of these low prospects employability of graduates (Figure 1).

Highlighting the relevance of academic subjects in actual work life also demonstrates the importance of common subjects such as communication, marketing, management, business, economics, etc.. In particular, hospitality students can relate to how these knowledge help them in their future careers. (Churchward & Riley, 2002). Therefore hospitality education should include a variety of transferable subjects that can help bridge the gap between vocational education and management education (Figure 1). Students should be equipped with management skills – a requirement that comes from an evolving employment market. In terms of talent management, this ensures that the education matches the young graduate career expectations.. Education is caught in the dilemma of “transferability” of the body of knowledge between academia and industry (Hjalager, 2003). Conventional tourism education seems to consider employability as a means-end goal, which short-changes students in addressing long range sustainability, and moral and ethical decision making functions (Inui, Wheeler, & Lankford, 2006a). Hospitality courses should provide both management and vocational education, while developing students’ ability to reflect and act (Jurowski, 2002). The composition of a bachelor degree curriculum commonly includes the study of the management subject and social sciences, and aims to develop capacity for thought, reason, pursuit of knowledge, and understanding (Dredge *et al.*, 2012).

Emerging Talent Management: Employability Assessed by Leadership and Management Skills

It is the educators’ responsibility to guide students to step outside of their cultural and social comfort zone in order to look at the issues from a new perspective (Inui *et al.*, 2006a). Tribe (2002) puts forward the ideal of the philosophical practitioner able to practice effectively in the industry (vocational action) and also to look for ways to improve his and others’ performance through reflection that allow talent growth. Lewis and Heckman (2006) argue that the notion of talent management is often considered synonymous to human resources

management by practitioners. They suggest that measuring performance and value is core to talent management, in that the process focuses on: attraction, retention, motivation and engagement, development, and succession planning. What differentiates talent management from human resources management is the combined use of: Competence (skills and abilities), Commitment (involvement and engagement) and Contribution (focus, meaning and identity) to tap employees' heart and developing leaders (Ulrich, 2008). Initiatives are integrated together to create a more coherent whole that encompasses the development and implementation of coordinated and sustaining approaches that help organizations to acquire talented people (Storey, 2007; Ulrich, 2008). In a HEI environment, the link between student and the industry lies mostly in building competence, commitment and contribution. It should include a systematic model that identifies and grows potential talent related to future performance.

The Rise of Expectations in the Hospitality Industry

Further to the discussion on the curriculum of hospitality, it is important also to look at the changes in hospitality in the context of South-East Asia. This region faces unprecedented changes and economic growth. There is a shortage of trained workforce in hospitality notably at the middle management level and this strongly accentuates the need of qualified graduates (ILO, 2010). Many countries in the ASEAN region have acknowledged the need for greater investment in skills training and employment services in the field of hospitality. There is a need to further strengthen demand-driven curricula in ASEAN with industry inputs (Chalamwong *et al.*, 2012). According to a comprehensive survey done in South-East Asia on 220 employers, only 13% of employers think that applicants with graduate degrees have all or most the skills they need for the jobs applied for (CAMFEBA, 2008). In the case of Cambodia, over 70% of employers noted a major shortage in management skills, 36% in middle management and supervisor skills, and 34% in professional staff; while, 52% of employers also identified work attitudes as a problem among unskilled workers and 45% of the respondent employers reported that decision-making skills in semi-skilled workers were lacking; and 64% cited analytical skills in skilled workers (Carpio, 2013). To address these issues, the ASEAN Secretariat has been active in advocating harmonization of vocational qualifications for entry level skills. The development of Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRAs) in the field of tourism and hospitality provides room for capacity building and mobility in ASEAN. It is admitted that improving the relevance and quality of education and training will require strong partnerships between government, employers and workers.

However, tertiary level of technical education is not included and the industry struggles to train and recruit middle management staff. It is more essential than before to further strengthen demand-driven curricula with industry inputs, as well as to attract academic staff with industry experience. Relevant work experience programmes that improve the employability of graduates need to be part of the curricula of universities and technical and vocational education institutions, as in Singapore and Malaysia (ILO, 2010). Little, Connor, Lebeau, Pierce, Sinclair, Thomas and Yarrow (2000) underline that HEIs are not engaging sufficiently with employers or researching their needs and that employers are confused about levels of higher education qualifications. Thus in areas where employers place emphasis on experience, sub-degree qualifications appear to be equated with degrees. In conclusion, the literature consistently points to the need for education providers to develop relevant tourism and hospitality industry support programmes to produce employable talents..

STEP Programme: An Initiative for Student Employment

Yorke and Knight (2004) describe employability as four broad and inter-related components: *Understanding* (subject), *Skills* (key skills, skilful practice), *Efficacy beliefs* (personal qualities) and *Meta cognition* (Beaven & Wright, 2006). In order to address issues faced by the industry, and to assert the competitiveness of Hospitality Management graduates in the global tourism marketplace, the university that was researched in this study has designed a training programme to provide an edge for its graduates' employability. Many student often expect HEIs to qualify them for a particular future career, and may lack the motivation to pursue independent goals. Students knew the skills and knowledge contained within the purchased 'package', but they do not know how to use them in creative or novel ways to project their employability (Inui *et al.*, 2006a). In other words employability is about graduates being ready to secure work of a suitable level within a reasonable time of graduation and being equipped with a wide range of skills to develop their chosen career. The institution that designed this programme was guided by this approach. The STEP was developed by a Malaysian HEI for hospitality undergraduate students in 2011.

This programme aims to offer students an opportunity to enjoy industrial work experience, even before they graduate and to offer them a direct access to middle management position upon graduation. Under this partnership, selected hotel groups adopt a group of 15 students within a batch, where the students are carefully selected by both the academic team and the hotel management team. STEP was initially launched in 2011 with Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts (including Traders Hotel). Over time, the educational institution extended partnerships with other international hotels chains to widen the programme and provide more opportunities for students. As of the first quarter of 2015, the university is in partnership with Shangri-La Hotel & Resorts, Hilton Worldwide, (including Double Tree, Conrad Hotels), Starwood Hotel Group (including Sheraton, Le Meridien, Westin, A-Loft), Accor, and Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group.

Programme Organization

Selected students will be grouped into elite STEP class, where they will undergo structured trainings / workshops under the guidance of the partners. The programme facilitates various trainings, workshops and requires participants to undergo corporate training, soft skills, operational trainings (Kitchen, food and beverage (F&B), administration) and management trainings. Participants will gain experience working on projects, campaigns and presentations organized by the partner hotels. As of June 2014 a total of 60 students were in the STEP programme and 30 students have already graduated.

Programme Structure

The programme starts in the second year of the Bachelor degree programme in hospitality. It starts after the selection process and lasts for four semesters over two years. Students are selected among a cohort of 150 to 200 students based on those pursuing this Bachelor programme.

Every semester 15 successful candidates will form a group in the STEP programme. These students are subjected to stringent criteria, thus the successful candidates fulfill the

Table 1. Selection process for STEP

1	Advertisement and promotion to semester 2 bachelor degree students and diploma students (who intend to continue into the bachelor degree)
2	Students fill in application forms
3	Short Listing of Candidates (Panel to select qualified applicants to be interviewed)
4	Interview session by Hotel groups
5	Selection of Candidates (Panel to select 15 successful candidates)
6	Issuance of appointment letters to the successful candidates

Table 2. Programme structure for STEP

Year 1	Semester 1 STEP Awareness development	Semester 2	
Year 2	Semester 3 Selection Process Training 1 Corporate Mission & Vision	Semester 4 Training 2 Soft Skills	Industrial Training 1
Year 3	Semester 5 Training 3 Operation Skills	Semester 6 Training 4 Management Sessions	Industrial Training 2

expectations of the university and industry partners in terms of: (a) academic qualification; (b) industry experience; (c) professional project; and (d) personal character. The same criteria of evaluation are applied by the faculty selecting committee in the first stage as well as by the industry partner in the second stage (Table 1). Generally, applicants are highly motivated and enthused to join a programme that has the full support of a 5-star rated industry partner. The applicants consider the STEP programme a platform to a promising career in hospitality.

Upon formation of the selected group, the 15 students participate in specially designed training sessions, workshops and seminars, organized by the industry partner while pursuing their Bachelor degree programme. A balance is developed whereby students become broadly educated and knowledgeable about, and responsible in, corporate culture as well as occupationally functional in hospitality. During the programme students undertake two four- to six-month internships with the STEP industry (Table 2). The choice of internship answers both the interests of the employer as well as those of the students. The student population is diversified, with more than 40 nationalities represented. Although English is used as the language of instruction, the university offers a multilingual and multicultural environment that provides a wide range of global opportunities.

Hotel chains are able to plan their regional expansion plans with a future pool of talent in view that Indonesia, China, Maldives and India nationals are also part of the STEP students, together with Malaysian students. The latter are also usually able to master at least three languages including Chinese and English, which add value to a future global career with 5-star

hotel chains. But in any case, the scope of the programme is to develop a strong relationship between the student and the company at the end of the two years. Upon successful completion of the programme students will be offered full-time employment opportunities in the role of a hotel executive in the partner hotel (TEG, 2013). The promise of an employment is nevertheless conditional on the attitude and performance of the students, as mentioned in the findings from the STEP stakeholders later in this paper.

Discussion on STEP Implementation

Since the launch of the STEP Programme in 2011, 45 students have graduated from the programme, and four 5-star international Hotel groups are partners. Given the course structure that divides a degree programme into four semesters, and the fact that only 15 students per intake are selected for the STEP programme; there are 60 students in the programme at any point of the year. The discussion and the reflection on the programme is articulated around the three key stakeholders, namely: (a) the students; (b) faculty members; and (c) industry partners.

Developing Confidence and Professionalism: Students' Perspectives

The trainings offered by the industry partners have generated positive response from the students that are part of the programme. The sense of belonging is accentuated with designed trainings that reinforce the knowledge of the company culture, together with general corporate culture knowledge.

"The trainings offered by the hotel enable us to learn much more than other students who are not in the programme" (CY, STEP group representative).

This statement was widespread among the different groups and cohorts interviewed. Although the group representative expressed views shared by the majority, other important points were also mentioned individually such as time management.

"I've learned how to complete my tasks with proper time management, and thus feeling more confident" (JY, STEP student).

The acquisition of leadership skills is often mentioned by students together with a sense of pride to be associated with prestigious hotel chains. *"We feel proud and honoured, because we are part of the Hilton group (of students)"* (VW, STEP student). This sentiment is prevalent in the distinction with other 'regular' students. The cohesiveness of the STEP group and sense of belonging is therefore accentuated, to the benefit of the hotel group trainer.

The training sessions conducted by the industry partners are perceived to *"really helps to build the students in terms of personality, character"* (HS, STEP student). Communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving skills, fitting into the organizational culture, time management, the internalization of the industry partner's mission and vision statement and the setting of long term goals were stated as benefits of the STEP programme. Students have integrated the discourse and matured their understanding of the corporation where they interned. Students who had already graduated also appreciated the opportunities offered by the STEP programme.

However the professional outcome of graduates varies according to the personal involvement of the students. Three main categories of STEP graduates can be drawn. The first one is characterized by the *'Employability Success-stories'*. About 30% of the STEP graduates belong

to this group. They were offered the next level of management trainee within the hotel group for about 18 months. The first graduates were offered full time management positions in their choice of area in Sales and Guest Services. They were hired in properties in Malaysia and China.

“When I was selected in this STEP programme and in line with my passion driven thirst of excelling in the people industry, finally I have reached a milestone now being hired as Guest Services manager after completing the management training programme” (R, STEP student).

This group of students is defined by a high level of motivation attachment towards the brand and clear vision of their future career. The second and third categories of students can be characterized as ‘*Employability competitive*’. About 60% of students fall in the second group while the remaining 10% fall within the last group. Both groups were successful in the programme and developed a strong professional environment understanding. They joined the industry directly, without management training. They consider themselves as equipped with a competitive advantage compared with other Bachelor degree graduates from hospitality. The second category students remain loyal to the STEP industry partners while the third group of students planned and decided to work with a different company upon graduation. The most common reason being that they have been offered better employments by other hotels.

Faculty Members’ Feedback

A total of five lecturers have been involved in the process of mentoring students since 2011. From the experience shared by these mentors, certain salient characteristics about the STEP programme are discernible. The emphasis is on the exclusivity of the programme, and the unique opportunity provided to students to prepare themselves with skills complementing the classroom knowledge.

“The creation of this programme creates challenges among the students to be outstanding in this profession whereby the interview process is very stringent by the hotel” (F, STEP Mentor).

Others also emphasize the value of corporate training gained from top employers. The faculty members also highlight that the positive changes can be noticed between the STEP students and other students after the internship period. STEP students have adopted the attitude of employees and are more involved in their practicum compared with other students.

“It is opportunity for potential students who have chosen this profession to be accepted as they will be groomed and trained for the company itself” (A, STEP Mentor)

Some areas of difficulties are mentioned, such as the adjustment required from some students coming with unrealistic expectations.

“Some are more brand conscious (5-star property), but are not task-oriented, and that creates a difficulty in matching expectations” (P, STEP Mentor)

Nevertheless all mentors interviewed agreed that there exists an energized feeling about the STEP students in being part of a ‘privileged’ group. The weaknesses of the students are essentially internal while most students can meet the standards of the industry partners. Faculty members indicate that the hotel group trainers play a crucial role in being able to communicate the expectations and define the requirements for their company. The academic staff involved in the programme also emphasized the need for specific management techniques, and further training on how to apply such knowledge. The benefits of the programme lie in enabling the students to understand and practice leadership through a maturation phase that is much longer than the usual internship. The development of a personal relationship with the

industry contact people is noticed by the academic staff.

“The training conducted by the Hotels helps to fast-track the adoption of the company organization and culture by the students” (P, STEP mentor)

Although dubbed a ‘fast-track’ to middle management position, during the two years of the STEP programme, students have time to mature, and go through behavioural changes that soften the transition from campus life to working environment. The various STEP modules teach students *“to identify, understand and address how current and future issues might impact their operation and their stakeholders and require problem-solving skills developed through these real-life case studies”* (A, STEP mentor).

Industry Partners’ Feedback

The hotel groups involved, through their training managers and facilitators played a key role in the outcome for each group of students. The leadership skills gained is important to them. They concur in saying that the most important aspect is values and vision for the future. In that extent the role of the industry trainer is to help develop a sense of maturity among students. *“To inspire and guiding others towards building and achieving a shared vision.”* (VB, Hilton Trainer). This includes identifying personal characteristics by *“using trait theories to create effective leaders”* (VB, Hilton Trainer). The trainers aim to use the best leadership ways that will benefits the students and the hospitality industry by exploring the best strategy.

In this regard, one respondent stated: *“with the right training given and with student’s placement under one company enables them to monitor the performances of the students”* (W. MO Trainer). In this way the industry partners are able to provide constructive feedback to the students in terms of their performances.

The career prospects of the students are given the promise of international mobility due to the global standing of the hotel groups. It is interesting to note contrasted views between students and industry on the choice of placement for internships. On one hand, the industry partners feel that they have invested time and efforts in grooming these students and developing their talents with a scope of employing them in Malaysia upon graduating. On the other hand, student share the perception that the first internship should be in Malaysia, but the final internship of their bachelor degree should be at any of the hotel group property worldwide. Hotel groups involved in the programme have a regional vision in accordance with ambitious expansion plans. Hilton Worldwide currently operates 3,843 hotels worldwide, mainly in North America and is expected to complete 300 new hotels by 2017 (Hilton Worldwide, 2014) while Marriott has 186 hotel properties by 2016, and will double to 330 hotels by 2020 (Marriott, 2014). Most of the growth is in the Asian region where number of employees has reached 45,000 in 2014 and is expected to grow up to 80000 by 2017 (half of which is in China). In Asia Pacific Accor Group plans to open 227 new hotels by 2017, while Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts will open 31 hotels by 2017 (Shangri-La, 2014)(Shangri-La, n.d.) . Starwood Hotels and Resorts are also planning a major expansion of its operations in the region with the addition of 110 new properties by 2017 to the existing 320 hotels. The needs from the hotel groups are pressing, and they value this programme as part of a larger talent sourcing. Students, with almost half being non-Malaysians, are also conscious of the value of their language and cross-cultural skills that enhance their employability across Asia. This shows contrasting views between the hotel groups global views on the possibility of mobility of graduates, and the hotel properties located in the country, that administrate the programme

with a strong focus on the present and future needs. These expansion needs are not necessarily in sync with students' expectations of being employed in properties abroad.

After three years of operations, it is confirmed that STEP students have benefited because they are very employable, with management knowledge, experience and related interpersonal skills. The outcome is positively acknowledged. As emphasized by Ng (2008) the STEP experience shows the importance of investment for the development of human capital and skilled labour, which can contribute to productivity that in turn, can help the growth of economy. In the authors' view, enhanced monitoring of the STEP students progresses and a constant one to one coaching from the trainers can improve the programme. Furthermore the trainings can be held twice a month instead of the current standards of once a month session.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the development of this STEP programme appears to be timely with the changes in both academia and industry regarding the type of professional and managerial education in the tourism and hospitality. It is argued that this programme is designed to respond to the needs of a growing industry while educating students to be reflective individuals who are capable of taking a leadership role within the industry eventually. The experience developed remains quite unique. It is recommended that HEIs develop similar programmes to contribute to a matching between the needs for employable graduates and the preparation of students to enter their professional life. Hospitality industry needs human capital to run it and requires many different specialised and management skills. The availability of human capital is important to tourism industry and this channel of skilled labour is vital for technical progress. The solution is to develop specific programmes that associate the academic curriculum with a continuous and frequent personalized industry engagement. This involves providing students with first-hand knowledge of the management process and values of the industry while using techniques and capabilities learned on campus. The STEP programme systemizes the principles of Talent management between HEI and industry. It introduces the notions of competences, commitment and contribution developed between selected students and potential future employers. Henceforth, the development of employment programmes such as STEP by Hospitality HEIs is particularly critical for fostering a progressive cycle of higher productivity, employment-rich and income-led growth and development.

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