Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Much of the literature review refers to relatively old papers, most of them before the year 2000, suggesting that for academics the debate about the required skills of hospitality managers is somewhat resolved. However, the results of the focus groups suggest that this viewpoint has not been fully adopted by industry. Nonetheless, it appears that both discussions generally complement each other with industry and academics recognising similar issues and trends towards skills and competencies.

The literature review raised several themes that can be summarised as:
- There is a need for higher level and generic skills
- There is a need to emphasis critical thinking, problem solving, strategic planning and leadership
- The industry has to deal with complex and changing environments delivered by the phenomenon like globalisation, technological developments and cultural diversity
- There is a need to find a right balance between practice and theory
- Beside the traditional skills, employees should have some general knowledge in marketing, management, HR, accounting, numeracy and computer/information technology
- Curriculum do not include innovation and risk taking and assessing subjects.
- Teaching should take a 'learning styles' approach.

Findings of the consolidated focus groups consistently reiterated these themes. Indeed professional managers are well aware that the industry has to deal with additional and external factors such as globalisation, technological development and cultural diversity. The industry is moving away from the traditional reactive approach to a more proactive engaging perspective. Furthermore, because it depends more on complex and changing environments, employees are required to develop some higher skills (problem solving, critical thinking and so on). However, both the literature review and the focus group findings concur that the industry is very much rooted in a traditional approach and needs to put a greater emphasis on communication skills, attitude and motivation before any higher skills.

The literature review also acknowledges a trend toward an increased interest in career development but also recognises that it is a long process, which again respects some traditional paths such as a bottom-up approach where, in F&B for example, it is still requisite. The new generation of graduates are ambitious and do not have the patience to go through the traditional the steps of a career path. Additionally, they favour a better work/life balance, which is not always compatible with the hospitality industry. As a consequence, these new graduates tend to leave the industry for more attractive hours and pay. These are some of the reasons why professionals mentioned an important skills shortages and strong difficulties in recruitment. Mai-Dalton, Latham and Fiedler (1978) argue that in some cases adequate training would be more useful than academic qualification. However, respondents in the focus groups pinpointed the fact that training was often provided by unskilled trainers who do not have any knowledge of the industry and provide inadequate and inconsistent training. Furthermore, this training is highly commercialised, meaning that it is available to anyone who can pay without any regards to the real potential and appropriateness of the individual.

One point that was mentioned in the literature that was not reflected in the focus groups was the international character of the industry. This imposes on managers, additional competencies such as the ability to deal with cultural and value differences, and the need for language skills and employee mobility.

To conclude, this research suggests that industry representatives and practising academics are aware that there is a need for change. Firstly, the industry needs to develop a more attractive image so as to ensure a certain level of employee recruitment and retention. Secondly, it is important to define a clear portable nationally recognised educational and skills scheme in terms of qualification, training and practice. Such actions should go hand in hand with a strong promotional work to change the image of the industry and thus attract adequate and professional employees.