

## Exploring skill-based career transitions for entry-level hospitality and tourism workers

Arthur Huang<sup>\*</sup>, Mark Baker

Rosen College of Hospitality Management, University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL, 32819, USA

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Career transition  
Entry-level workers  
Transferable skills  
On-the-job training

### ABSTRACT

This research note explores the prospect of cross-industry, skill-based career transitions for workers in entry-level hospitality and tourism positions. The note reports on the lack of hospitality and tourism literature currently discussing career transitions and uses the Occupational Information Network (ONet) database to develop SWAT (skill, work activity, ability, technology skill) profiles for two entry-level hospitality/tourism positions. The profiles are used to identify areas where skills overlap with different entry-level positions from other industries, such as information technology, business/finance, healthcare, and education. The findings reveal that (1) the number of hospitality and tourism research studies that critically consider career transitions and barriers are limited, (2) the skill profiles of entry-level hospitality and tourism positions overlap with different entry-level jobs from other industries, and (3) hospitality and tourism workers should enhance their technology skills to increase their employability. Lastly, theoretical and practical implications are provided.

### 1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted the hospitality and tourism industry worldwide. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), during 2019, hospitality and tourism supplied approximately 330 million jobs around the world and generated more than 10% of the global GDP (WTTC, 2020); nonetheless, the industry now risks losing 98 to 197 million jobs worldwide due to the pandemic (WTTC, 2020). As millions of affected workers seek to rejoin the labor market, career transitions may become increasingly common. A career transition can be defined as “the period during which an individual is either changing roles (taking on a different objective role) or changing orientation to a role already held (altering a subjective state)” (Louis, 1980, p. 330). The topic of career transitions has been examined across various contexts and dimensions, and individuals view career transitions as opportunities to remain in or increase their labor market value (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021). When seeking to change careers, individuals must contend with psychological factors, such as awareness (discovering that certain jobs or opportunities exist), achievability (people assessing transition feasibility relative to their skills), and attractiveness (how appealing an individual may find a particular position) (Gunz et al., 2007). Moreover, competency factors, such as know-how, which includes work-related knowledge, abilities, and skills (DeFillippi & Arthur,

1994), also shape career transition pathways.

Hospitality and tourism workers face significant career development challenges. Individuals in the industry need to acquire more business-oriented skills and abilities (Daniel et al., 2017). However, hospitality and tourism’s overall education level is low (Daniel et al., 2017; Casado-Díaz & Simon, 2016). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), industry educational attainment levels indicate that 15% of workers did not complete high school, 34% earned high school diplomas, and 25% attended college but did not complete a degree (BLS, 2020). The levels of industry support and on-the-job training also remain low; approximately 17% of workers receive no training, and around 49% receive only short-term training (BLS, 2020). Given that the hospitality and tourism workforce is particularly vulnerable to emergency circumstances, such as Covid-19 (Baum et al., 2020), examining transferable skills and career transitions in hospitality and tourism deserves greater attention (Martins et al., 2020). Against this background, the following research objectives are developed:

- 1) Identify hospitality/tourism literature trends related to career transitions from the previous decade, 2011–2020.
- 2) Identify how the skills of entry-level hospitality/tourism jobs (e.g., desk clerks and waiters/waitresses) overlap with the skills of entry-

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [arthur.huang@ucf.edu](mailto:arthur.huang@ucf.edu) (A. Huang), [mbaker2009@knights.ucf.edu](mailto:mbaker2009@knights.ucf.edu) (M. Baker).

level jobs from the information technology, business/finance, healthcare, and education industries.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Literature search method

The following string is used to search EBSCOhost’s Hospitality & Tourism Complete database: SU (career OR training) AND SU (skill OR education OR transition OR change), where SU denotes the search subject term in the database. The initial literature search yields 1182 results. The inclusion criteria are set to capture peer-reviewed articles available in English and published in academic journals between 2011 and 2020 that focus on skills, career transitions, training, or education in hospitality or tourism. The authors filter the results by using the inclusion criteria, which leaves 117 articles remaining. Next, the authors screen the remaining studies. Forty-seven results regard discussions unrelated to this note’s topic (e.g., nutrition, childcare, dance, physical education, etcetera) and are excluded. The remaining 70 articles are then analyzed and categorized into themes. The overarching themes are developed using the database’s subject terms of the finalized search results, keywords, and abstracts. For example, the final articles appear under subject terms such as “hospitality management education,” “career development,” “career changes,” “vocational guidance,” “educational certification,” “employee training,” “higher education,” “tourism education,” “training,” “job performance,” “ability,” etcetera. These terms are consolidated into three broader categories. Ultimately, the themes derived are 1) education programs (e.g., designing or adjusting higher education curriculums), 2) skill/competency training, and 3) career change/barriers. The literature search method is illustrated in Fig. 1.

### 2.2. ONet skill collection method

The Occupational Information Network (ONet) database is a publicly available resource developed and maintained with sponsorship from the United States Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration. ONet aims to provide data related to jobs using a standard occupational classification taxonomy (ONet, 2020). ONet’s information and functionality demonstrate utility for research regarding labor markets and occupations (Handel, 2016) and instruction at the university level (Chauhan, 2019). Studies employ ONet for various purposes, such as examining how attributes of jobs change over time (e.g., Freeman et al., 2020) and evaluating how susceptible jobs are to automation by investigating occupational skills and activities (e.g., Josten & Lordan, 2020). For this note, the authors use ONet to identify the overlapping skills, work activities, abilities, and technology skills (SWAT) of entry-level positions representing hospitality, tourism, information technology, business/finance, healthcare, and education sectors. The titles of the SWAT categories are the titles used by the ONet database. The authors collect data under each SWAT category for the following ten jobs: desk clerk, waiter/waitress, information security analyst, real estate agent, insurance policy clerk, advertising sales agent, teacher assistant, nursing assistant, human resources specialist, and business intelligence analyst. The desk clerk and waiter/waitress positions are

used as samples because they are among the lowest-paying, entry-level jobs in the hospitality and tourism industry (Dogru et al., 2019). Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the SWAT profiles for desk clerks and waiters/waitresses, which represent the hospitality and tourism industry. Once the profiles for each occupation are complete, the authors compare the SWAT characteristics of front desk clerks and waiters/waitresses to the characteristics from the profiles across other industries to identify common attributes.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Literature search results

The skill/competency training theme yields the highest number of studies (35); however, it should be noted that some studies only address specific job training contexts, such as tour guide training, and do not address the topic of skills and training more broadly. The career change/barriers and education program themes yield 17 and 18 results, respectively. The highest number of total studies is seen in 2011 (14), while the lowest totals are found in 2012 and 2015 (3). Fig. 2 visualizes the number of each literature theme identified per year. Overall, the results indicate that the hospitality and tourism literature must engage more with career development topics, especially career change and barriers to a career change, to prepare and enable its workforce more sufficiently. Research on career development, enhancement, and transition in the hospitality and tourism industry is lacking; this finding agrees with other studies (e.g., McGinley et al., 2014). The hospitality literature is discussing topics such as employee adaptability (e.g., Rasheed et al., 2020), career intention, career satisfaction (Chang & Busser, 2020), and internship satisfaction (Mensah et al., 2020); however, additional insight is needed on how to enhance the skills and career development paths of hospitality and tourism workers.

### 3.2. ONet SWAT results

For the desk clerk and waiter/waitress SWAT sample comparisons, the overlap values are most positively affected by the categories of skills and abilities; this is likely due to the generality of the variables that compose the skills and abilities sections. For example, all jobs sampled in this paper require the abilities of oral comprehension, oral expression, speech clarity, speech recognition, deductive reasoning, and near vision. The areas of work activities and technology skills characterize the areas of least overlap across the jobs sampled. Fig. 3 illustrates the SWAT overlap for hotel, motel, and resort desk clerks relative to jobs in other industries. The sum of the SWAT profile characteristics for desk clerks is 56. Out of the positions selected for comparison across industries, front desk clerks demonstrate the greatest SWAT overlap with real estate agents. The skills of reading comprehension, speaking, and active listening are found across all jobs in the sample, while the skill of management of personnel resources is unique to desk clerks. Work activities appearing for all positions include getting information, communicating with supervisors, peers, or subordinates, establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, and monitoring processes, material, or surroundings. Technology skills for all jobs include database user interface and query software, electronic mail software, office suite

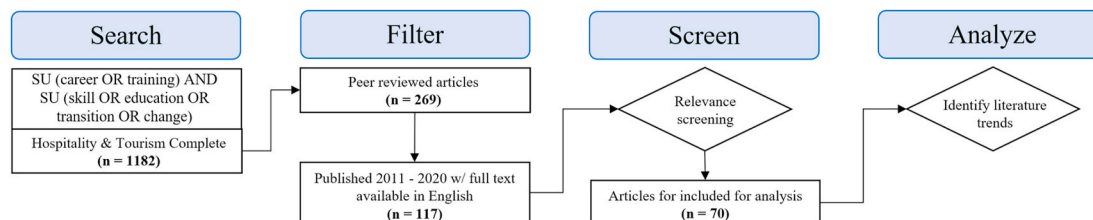


Fig. 1. Literature search method.

**Table 1**  
Desk clerk SWAT profile.

Skills	Work activities	Abilities	Technology skills
social perceptiveness	interacting with computers	oral comprehension	database user interface and query software
speaking	getting information	oral expression	desktop publishing software
service orientation	performing for or working directly with the public	speech clarity	electronic mail software
active listening	making decisions and solving problems	speech recognition	facilities management software
coordination	communicating with supervisors, peers, or subordinates	near vision	financial analysis software
complex problem solving	resolving conflicts and negotiating with others	problem sensitivity	office suite software
judgment and decision making	identifying objects, actions, and events	category flexibility	presentation software
management of personnel resources	establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships	deductive reasoning	spreadsheet software
monitoring	processing information	information ordering	web page creation and editing software
reading comprehension	updating and using relevant knowledge	written comprehension	word processing software
time management	documenting/recording information	written expression	
	performing administrative activities		
	organizing, planning, and prioritizing work		
	communicating with persons outside of organization		
	coordinating the work and activities of others		
	selling or influencing others		
	analyzing data or information		
	assisting and caring for others		
	training and teaching others		
	monitor processes, materials, or surroundings		
	evaluating information to determine compliance with standards		
	judging the qualities of things, services, or people		
	coaching and developing others		
	developing and building teams		

Data source: (ONet, 2020)

software, spreadsheet software, and word processing software. The technology skill of facilities management software appears only for the desk clerks, implying such a skill is unnecessary for the positions sampled from other industries. Out of the jobs sampled using the SWAT criteria for desk clerks, the “abilities” section has the highest similarity, while the “work activities” are the least similar.

For waiters/waitresses, the SWAT characteristics sum is 37, and the profiles of waiters/waitresses overlap most greatly with nursing assistants. The “skills” section demonstrates the highest level of similarity across positions when using the SWAT criteria of waiters/waitresses. Active listening and speaking skills are found across all positions, while service orientation and social perceptiveness are the least common skills for jobs in the sample. Waiter/waitress abilities common to all jobs measured include oral comprehension, oral expression, speech clarity, speech recognition, near vision, and deductive reasoning. The least common abilities across jobs involve time-sharing, stamina, and trunk strength. Getting information, communicating with supervisors, peers,

or subordinates, establishing and maintain interpersonal relationships, and monitoring processes, materials, or surroundings are the work activities found in all the jobs investigated. The “technology skills” is the least similar category across positions when using the SWAT criteria of waiters/waitresses. None of the technology skills of waiters/waitresses overlap with insurance policy clerks, advertising sales agents, teacher assistants, or nursing assistants. Fig. 4 visualizes the SWAT overlap for waiters and waitresses with jobs in other industries.

#### 4. Discussion

##### 4.1. Theoretical implications

Career transitions are being examined through various lenses (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021); however, this research note underscores the need for more critical discussions revolving around career transitions, skill training, and education programs in hospitality and tourism. This

**Table 2**  
Waiter/waitress SWAT profile.

Skills	Work activities	Abilities	Technology skills
active listening	getting information	oral comprehension	point of sale POS software
service orientation	performing for or working directly with the public	oral expression	web page creation and editing software
speaking	communicating with supervisors, peers, or subordinates	speech clarity	
social perceptiveness	establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships	speech recognition	
coordination	resolving conflicts and negotiating with others	near vision	
monitoring	monitor processes, materials, or surroundings	time sharing	
	assisting and caring for others	arm-hand steadiness	
	handling and moving objects	deductive reasoning	
	identifying objects, actions, and events	problem sensitivity	
	performing general physical activities	selective attention	
	evaluating information to determine compliance with standards	trunk strength	
	judging the qualities of things, services, or people	stamina	
	training and teaching others		
	coordinating the work and activities of others		
	selling or influencing others		
	inspecting equipment, structures, or material		
	making decisions and solving problems		

Data source: (ONet, 2020)

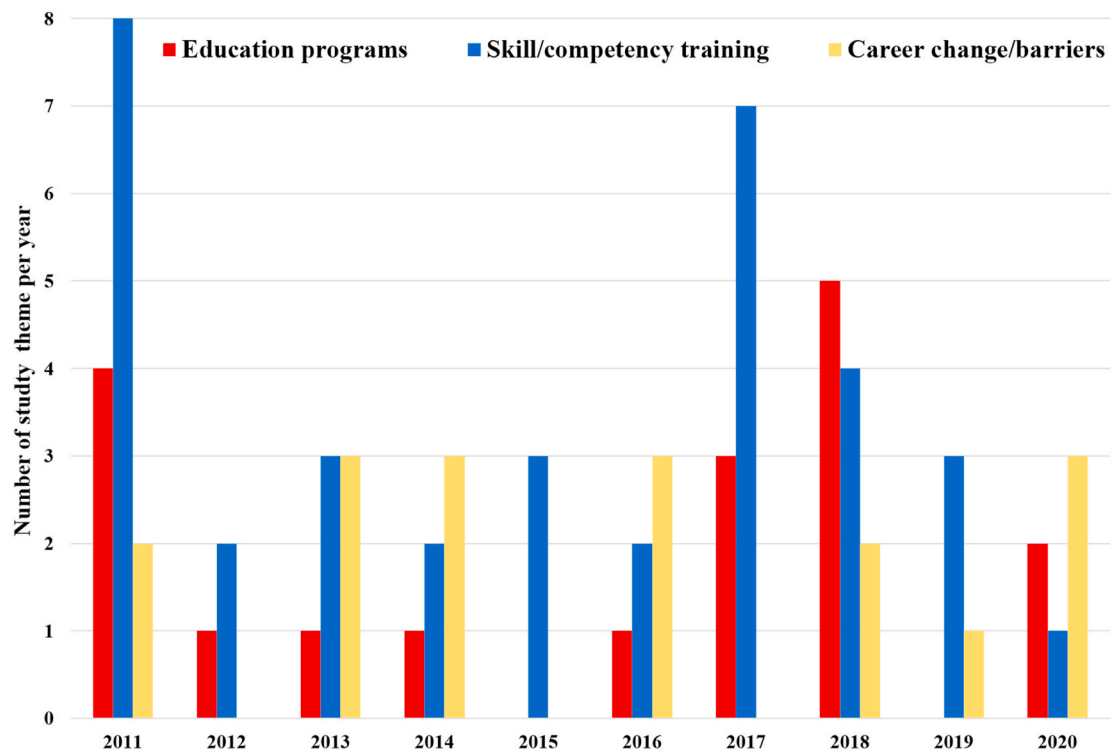


Fig. 2. Number of each literature theme identified per year, 2011–2020.

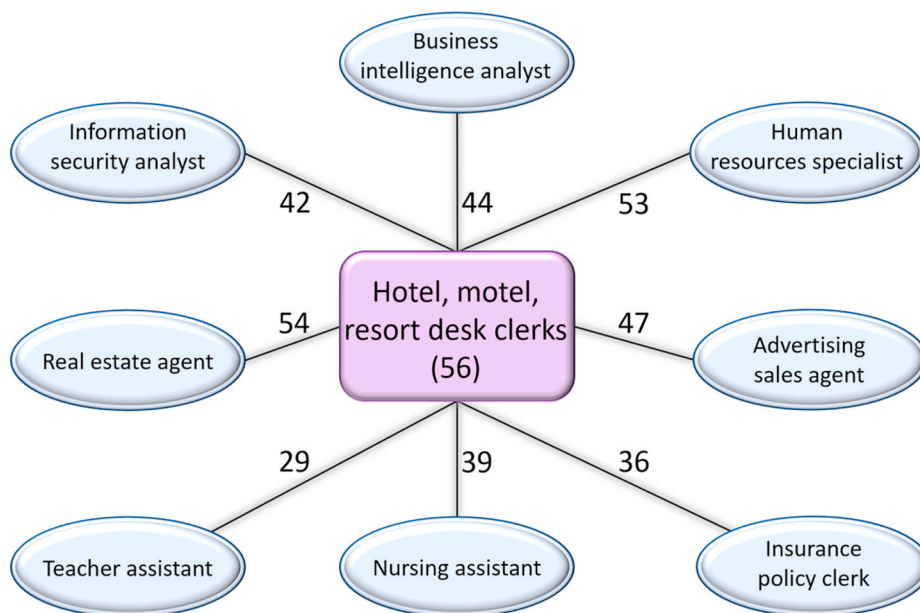


Fig. 3. Desk clerk SWAT profile overlap with jobs in other industries (the number on the lines represents the number of skills from other positions that overlap with desk clerks).

Data source: (ONet, 2020)

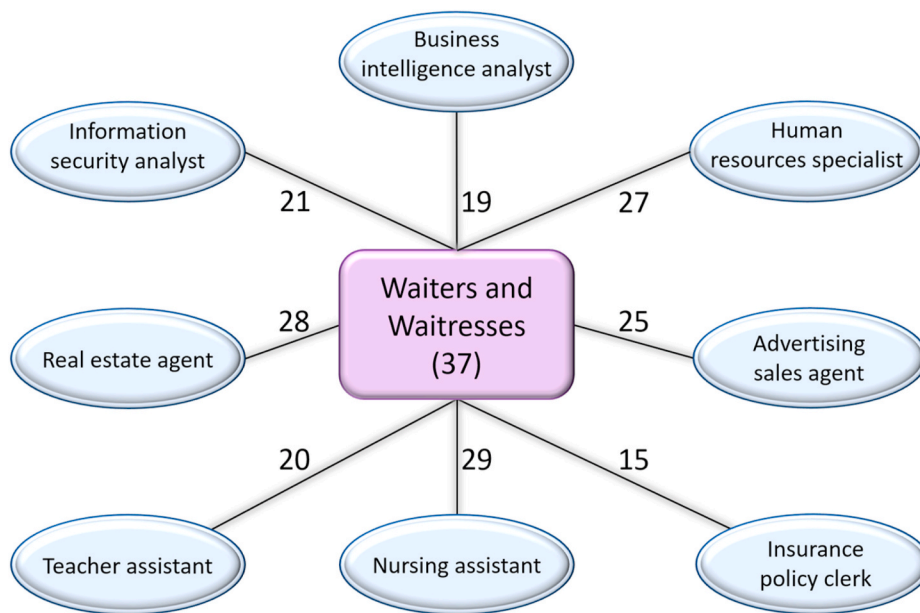


Fig. 4. Waiter/waitress SWAT profile overlap with jobs in other industries (the number on the lines represents the number of skills from other positions that overlap with waiters/waitresses).

Data source: (ONet, 2020)

note’s results demonstrate that deeper insight into hospitality and tourism workers’ specific workplace skills and abilities may be useful when developing career transition models. Existing vocational development theories may be enhanced by utilizing occupational data from publicly available sources, such as ONet, or private companies, such as EMSI (EMSI, 2021) or Burning Glass (Burning Glass, 2021). Combining theoretical models with occupational data and skill taxonomies may further the understanding of contemporary career transition constructs and assist in the development of novel career transition vectors. Additionally, this note adds to the research dialogue focusing on the careers of the hospitality and tourism workforce. For example, some scholars, such as Wakelin-Theron et al. (2019), consider the increasingly

technologically oriented employment world and describe the value of advancing tourism graduates’ technical skills and competencies. Other scholars (e.g., Tolkach & Tung, 2019), focus on developing networks to identify tourism graduates’ mobility trajectories and career patterns to uncover how hospitality and tourism talent transitions worldwide. While some recent studies have critically examined careers, technology, and skills, the emphasis on technology-oriented skills and abilities in the context of career transitions must continue.

Future work should explore how to assist workers in overcoming career boundaries by embracing boundaryless career models (e.g., Guan et al., 2019; Kost et al., 2020) or exploring career adaptability theories (e.g., Kusyadi, 2019). The research must also acknowledge the career



development issues certain populations, such as women, face in the hospitality and tourism industry to address gender and pay equality issues (Gebbels et al., 2020). Ultimately, it is clear that significantly more contemporary and progressive research into career transitions and development is needed as the economy and landscape of the hospitality and tourism industry continues to evolve.

#### 4.2. Practical applications

This note's findings indicate that managers should identify potential avenues to assist workers with developing their technology-related skills to broaden the scope of their workers' future employment opportunities. Given that hospitality and tourism personnel are at a relative wage disadvantage compared to other industries in the labor market (Dogru et al., 2019), education and skill development options may be limited. Nevertheless, firms must consider that technology-related skills remain in demand (Cummings & Janicki, 2020). Therefore, industry practitioners should evaluate the benefits and challenges associated with allowing employees to complete more technologically oriented programs such as coding bootcamps (Thayer & Ko, 2017) or massive open online courses (MOOCs) (Liu et al., 2019), as they are avenues where workers may gain new technology-related abilities. Allowing workers to participate in such programs may afford them more opportunities to advance their careers inside or outside their current industries. Firms may also evaluate the merit of public-private partnerships to identify how such relationships may increase educational opportunities (Mitra, 2020) to enhance workers' technical skills through specialized development programs.

### 5. Conclusion and limitations

#### 5.1. Conclusion

This research note identifies the literature trends related to career transition, skill development, and training in a reputable hospitality and tourism research database during the previous decade. The note also explores the value of investigating skills, work activities, abilities, and technology skills from an occupational skill database. The hospitality and tourism literature must further engage in discussions that revolve around career transition. Identifying functional skill overlap between jobs is an area that requires more critical examination.

#### 5.2. Limitations

One database was used to collect literature; future work may use additional resources to supplement the literature findings. The ONet database was used to identify skills, and using other means may increase the number and type of skills identified. Future empirical studies may consider employing additional resources to identify literature and skills more comprehensively. Future work should quantify the importance of attributes for certain jobs to determine alternative career trajectories.

#### Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the US National Science Foundation under Grant ID 1937833.

#### References

Baum, T., Mooney, S. K. K., Robinson, R. N. S., & Solnet, D. (2020). "COVID-19's impact on the hospitality workforce – new crisis or amplification of the norm?". *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 32(9), 2813–2829.

- BLS. (2020, September 1). Education and training assignments by detailed occupation. Retrieved October 05, 2020, from <https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/education-and-training-by-occupation.htm>.
- Burning Glass. (2021). Burning Glass technologies. Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.burning-glass.com/>.
- Casado-Díaz, J. M., & Simon, H. (2016). Wage differences in the hospitality sector. *Tourism Management*, 52, 96–109.
- Chang, W., & Busser, J. A. (2020). Hospitality career retention: The role of contextual factors and thriving at work. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 32(1), 193–211.
- Chauhan, R. S. (2019). Occupation exploration: Using O\* NET in the management classroom. *Management Teaching Review*, 4(1), 79–88.
- Cummings, J., & Janicki, T. N. (2020). What skills do students need? A multi-year study of IT/IS knowledge and skills in demand by employers. *Journal of Information Systems Education*, 31(3), 208.
- Daniel, A. D., Costa, R. A., Pita, M., & Costa, C. (2017). Tourism Education: What about entrepreneurial skills? *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 30, 65–72.
- DeFillippi, R. J., & Arthur, M. B. (1994). The boundaryless career: A competency-based perspective. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 15(4), 307–324.
- Dogru, T., McGinley, S., Line, N., & Szende, P. (2019). Employee earnings growth in the leisure and hospitality industry. *Tourism Management*, 74, 1–11.
- EMSI. (2021). Emsi. Retrieved March 11, 2021, from <https://www.economicmodeling.com/company/>.
- Freeman, R. B., Ganguli, I., & Handel, M. J. (2020, May). Within-occupation changes dominate changes in what workers do: A shift-share decomposition, 2005–2015. In *AEA papers and proceedings* (Vol. 110, pp. 394–399).
- Gebbels, M., Gao, X., & Cai, W. (2020). Let's not just "talk" about it: Reflections on women's career development in hospitality. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 32(11), 3623–3643.
- Guan, Y., Arthur, M. B., Khapova, S. N., Hall, R. J., & Lord, R. G. (2019). Career boundarylessness and career success: A review, integration and guide to future research. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 110, 390–402.
- Gunz, H., Peiperl, M., & Tzabbar, D. (2007). *Boundaries in the study of career. Handbook of career studies*.
- Handel, M. J. (2016). The O\* NET content model: Strengths and limitations. *Journal for Labour Market Research*, 49(2), 157–176.
- Josten, C., & Lordan, G. (2020). *Robots at work: Automatable and non-automatable jobs*. Springer International Publishing.
- Kost, D., Fieseler, C., & Wong, S. I. (2020). Boundaryless careers in the gig economy: An oxymoron? *Human Resource Management Journal*, 30(1), 100–113.
- Kusyadi, Y. (2019). Career adaptability in various theories: Review through multicultural perspectives. *JOMSIGN: Journal of Multicultural Studies in Guidance and Counseling*, 4(1), 14–27.
- Liu, M., Zou, W., Shi, Y., Pan, Z., & Li, C. (2019). What do participants think of today's MOOCs: An updated look at the benefits and challenges of MOOCs designed for working professionals. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 1–23.
- Louis, M. R. (1980). Career transitions: Varieties and commonalities. *Academy of Management Review*, 5(3), 329–340.
- Martins, A., Riordan, T., & Dolnicar, S. (2020). *A post-COVID-19 model of tourism and hospitality workforce resilience*.
- McGinley, S., O'Neill, J., Damaske, S., & Mattila, A. S. (2014). A grounded theory approach to developing a career change model in hospitality. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 38, 89–98.
- Mensah, C., Appietu, M. E., & Asimah, V. K. (2020). Work-based social support and hospitality internship satisfaction. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sports and Tourism Education*, 100242.
- Mitra, R. (2020). COVID-19 is killing education budgets: Are educational public-private partnerships an answer? *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 5(3/4), 255–264.
- ONet. (2020). O\*NetOnline. Retrieved October 07, 2020, from <https://www.onetonline.org/>.
- Rasheed, M. I., Okumus, F., Weng, Q., Hameed, Z., & Nawaz, M. S. (2020). Career adaptability and employee turnover intentions: The role of perceived career opportunities and orientation to happiness in the hospitality industry. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 44, 98–107.
- Sullivan, S. E., & Al Ariss, A. (2021). *Making sense of different perspectives on career transitions: A review and agenda for future research. Human resource management review*.
- Thayer, K., & Ko, A. J. (2017). Barriers faced by coding bootcamp students. In *Proceedings of the 2017 ACM conference on international computing education research* (pp. 245–253).
- Tolkach, D., & Tung, V. W. S. (2019). Tracing hospitality and tourism graduates' career mobility. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 31(10), 4170–4187.
- Wakelin-Theron, N., Ukpere, W., & Spowart, J. (2019). Determining tourism graduate employability, knowledge, skills, and competencies in a VUCA world: Constructing a tourism employability model. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism, and Leisure*, 8(3).
- WTTC. (2020). Economic impact reports. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from <https://wtcc.org/Research/Economic-Impact>.