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## Comparing strategic human resource development approaches for tourism and hospitality workforce planning

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### ABSTRACT

This study compared two approaches for strategic human resource development planning at a macro-level. This was done to develop an understanding of the impact of external change on current and future human resource needs in tourism and hospitality organizations. Using strategic human resource development planning theory, this article examined the application of a qualitative environmental scanning approach compared against quantitative labor market projections for the future workforce for tourism and hospitality occupations in one U.S. state. Interview data collected from a sample of tourism industry leaders in Minnesota identified changes in the economic, demographic, political and legislative, and technology sectors and the possible impact to current and future human resources employed. Data from labor market analysis highlighted future changes in the size and characteristics of the workforce and needed educational levels for workers in tourism and hospitality. Comparing results from both approaches showed each workforce planning method produced different types of data to assist human resource managers with future staffing decisions. Recommendations for practice include using a combined approach to make projections on the size, composition, and human resource development needs of the tourism and hospitality workforce.

### KEYWORDS

Environmental scanning;  
human resource forecasting;  
human resource  
development; strategic  
planning

### Introduction

Human resource professionals in tourism and hospitality organizations are increasingly tasked to create projections on the size, composition, and skill level of the future workforce (Bécherel, 2001; Davidson, McPhail, Barry, 2011; Haven-Tang & Jones, 2006; Riley, 1996; Saad, 2013). Workforce projections are occurring at a macro level as tourism-dependent cities, regions, and nations seek to estimate and model future employment patterns. Based on these projections, a range of

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human resource management and human resource development policies, practices, and programs can be planned to ensure that the workforce has the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform. A number of theoretical and modeling approaches have been used to make workforce projections (Costa, 2007; Craft, 1988; Szivas, Riley, & Airey, 2003).

For over 30 years the strategic planning literature has noted a lack of studies evaluating alternative workforce projection approaches (Cappelli, 2009; Chermack & Swanson, 2008; Fein, 2009; Holloway & King, 1979). Within human resource studies in tourism and hospitality, the gap between theory and practice for strategic planning remains an area for concern (Moutinho, 2011; Phillips & Moutinho, 2000). Ladkin (2011) lamented on the lack of studies on tourism labor despite the obvious need for research to inform practice for planning and management of current and future tourism workforce requirements. More recently, Solnet, Ford, Robinson, Ritchie, and Olsen (2014) noted that “scholarly attention to tourism workforce is sparse” (p. 31) and Harrington, Chathoth, Ottenbacher, and Altinay (2014) urged researchers to conduct studies on strategic management in hospitality and tourism to respond to the needs of the industry.

This study addressed the paucity of research on future workforce needs assessments and compared two approaches to strategic workforce planning: a multi-method research approach that included qualitative data from interviews and a quantitative labor market analysis. The first approach used qualitative data, drawn from interviews, to identify future trends in the external environment and their projected impact on the workforce. The second approach examined existing quantitative labor market analysis projection data and statistics collected and reported by various government departments and agencies to identify projected changes in the number and characteristics of the future workforce. The type of data and overall findings produced from each workforce planning method were compared.

### ***Purpose of the study and objectives***

The purpose of the study was to examine the two dominant methods for conducting strategic workforce planning: external environmental scanning with a sample of industry leaders and data from various labor market analysis sources. The study also sought to test the suitability of both methods to make a preliminary profile of the overall size and composition of the tourism workforce as well as the needed levels of education, training, and skills of future employees. The U.S.’s State of Minnesota was used as the data collection site with the year 2020 selected as the target date for future projections. More specifically, the study sought to address the following objectives:

- Determine tourism association leaders’ views on anticipated changes in Minnesota’s population, labor force size, and composition; and external environmental trends likely to impact the tourism industry and its workforce in the year 2020.

- Identify tourism industry workforce projections in 2020 in terms of population forecasts; predicted labor force analysis; and external environmental trends likely to impact the tourism industry and its workforce.
- Compare the outcomes of the future composition of the tourism workforce in Minnesota from industry experts and secondary labor market analysis data.

## Literature review

Managers have long recognized the need to consider the future and increasingly value the role of human resource professionals in shaping organization strategy (Lengnick Hall, Lengnick-Hall, Andrade, & Drake, 2009; Torraco & Swanson, 1995; Ulrich, 1997). A strategic approach to human resource management recognizes the need for future workforce planning to align with both the organizations' mission as well as with external environmental changes (Barney & Wright, 1998). A growing body of literature documents the process and outcomes of strategic planning as a component of strategic management in tourism and hospitality organizations (Evans, Campbell, & Stonehouse, 2003; Harrington & Ottenbacher, 2011; Reichel, 1983; West & Olsen, 1989).

Workforce planning from a strategic human resource perspective views the organization as needing to constantly respond to pressure and change driven by competition, new trends, and shifts in the external environment (Daft, 2010). In tourism and hospitality research, workforce planning is often framed at a macro-level, multi-organizational perspective (Bécherel, 2001). Macro-level strategic planning focuses on the delivery of core tourism and hospitality products and services provided by many organizations to ensure alignment with changes in the external environment. The increased awareness of the influence of the external environment on workforce planning and human resource development at both organizational as well as macro-levels has coincided with a growing number of challenges facing organizations and the industries in which they operate.

Baum (2006) noted that organizations in the tourism and hospitality sector are faced with significant changes that exert pressure on a range of employment related issues: heightened competition, new technologies, growing levels of legal compliance, changes in demographics and workforce composition, an increased diversification of services, as well as an acknowledged responsibility to increase the quality of life for employees (Genc, 2010). The tourism sector has also been subject to additional pressures in recent years including ongoing security concerns as well as changes in travel and visitor behavior resulting from 9/11, the global war on terror, and disruptive political events and armed conflicts. Lastly, fluxuation in transport and energy costs, environmental and natural disasters, and variability in the pace of recovery from the recent global economic slowdown has impacted patterns of tourism in many parts of the world and caused consequential changes to employment in tourism organizations at local, national, and global levels (Bonham, Edmonds, & Mak, 2006; Solnet, Kralj, & Baum, 2013). Despite the numerous

impacts these events have on the tourism sector it has long been accepted that changes on the supply and development of human resources is a critical labor market issue (Riley, Ladkin, & Szivas, 2002). As a result, tourism and hospitality organizations, as well as tourism-dependent economic regions, increasingly place emphasis on sourcing and analysis of information related to quantity and quality of current and future human resources as a component of the strategic planning process (Costa, 2007). The two main methods to gather data and information for workforce planning are external environmental scanning and labor market analysis.

### ***Environmental scanning within a strategic human resource planning framework***

Environmental scanning is a method to determine a strategic response to challenges that confront an organization through examination of external factors that may create change (Craft, 1988; Rothwell & Kazansas, 1994; Zhang, Majid, & Foo, 2010). The first notable study of environmental scanning by Aguilar (1967) defined the process as “scanning for information about events and relationships in a company’s outside environment, the knowledge of which would assist top management in its task of charting the company’s future course of action” (p. vii). The research on environmental scanning has traditionally focused on individual, large, for-profit firms although the technique has been successfully applied across an ever wider range of organizations, including public leisure agencies (Bartlett & McKinney, 2004) and in tourism and hospitality settings that have included restaurants (West & Olson, 1989), hotels (Jogarathnam & Wong, 2009), and country clubs (Gustafson & Partlow, 2002).

As noted by Costa (2007), research on environmental scanning follows a variety of directions. Several studies have examined the sectors of the external environment and the attention paid to each sector by managers and organizational leaders (Auster & Choo, 1993; Daft, Sormunen, & Parks, 1988). Findings from these studies indicate individual organizations tend to pay attention only to those areas of the external environment perceived to offer the greatest threats and opportunities. Ford, Major, Seaton, and Felber (1993) proposed a continuum to measure the extent to which the process of acquiring information was reactive or proactive. Their study of managers in 193 firms in the manufacturing sector found considerable variation in information acquisition strategies with some directors being highly proactive and others mainly reactive. Research on the frequency of scanning activity tends to find an increased occurrence during times of high strategic uncertainty (Daft et al., 1988; Okura, Dozier, Sha, & Hofstetter, 2009). The studies on the sources of information for environmental scanning show top level managers prefer internal and personal information provided from other leaders in the organization and from their professional business networks over impersonal sources such as government reports, newspapers, and published research findings (Ford et al., 1993; Jennings & Jones, 1999).

In the tourism and hospitality sector, Okumus (2004) reported that environmental scanning is even more complex and difficult to accomplish than often portrayed in the literature. In the 1980s, Reichel and Preble (1984) identified that constant change in the hospitality and tourism industries required organizations to engage in an ongoing process to continually gather information about external environmental trends. However, concern has been raised on the rigor of data collection methods with empirical research on the environmental scanning practices used by financial officers in U.S. restaurant, food, and beverage organizations identified as lacking sophistication (West & Olsen, 1989). Gustafson and Partlow's (2002; 2003) case study research on environmental scanning in U.S. country clubs concluded that those organizations not engaged in environmental scanning as part of their strategic planning struggled to survive. Furthermore, they found that the major sources of environmental scanning information for strategic planning used by country clubs were often limited to planning committees, boards, colleagues, consultants, and professional associations. More recently, Jogaratham and Wong (2009) found that hotel executives in Hong Kong tended to scan with greater frequency and more broadly when they perceived increased uncertainty in the external environment. Although there has been an increase in strategic planning and environmental scanning in hospitality and tourism organizations (Okumus, 2004) there remains very little research focused on scanning for human resource planning.

### ***Labor market analysis within a strategic human resource planning framework***

Economic theories of the labor market rely heavily on information based on projections about the demand and supply for labor (Ehrenberg & Smith, 2003). Labor market analysis reviews demographic, economic, social, and labor force information and data within a specified market, often defined as a community, city, region, country, or an industry. A labor market analysis should describe the supply characteristics, including human resources currently employed and future potential workers, as well as information on job opportunities in the labor market and the human resource needs of employers (Ashenfelter & Card, 1999).

As a branch of economics, the study of labor markets should attract attention from human resource scholars and practitioners given the acceptance of economics as a core foundation of the human resources field (Swanson & Holton, 2001; Wright & McMahan, 1992). Yet, as Wang and Holton (2005) commented, the understanding of economics in human resource management and development has often been narrowly confined with numerous economic theories and analysis techniques receiving scant attention in the literature.

Labor market demand forecasts are an essential requirement and component of tourism planning at both national and organizational levels (Song & Li, 2008). The importance of accurate forecasts for planning and decision making in tourism is well established (Witt, Song, & Wanhill, 2004). Tourism forecasts have generally

been concerned with projections of the number of tourist visits, tourist expenditures, and tourism impacts (Song & Witt, 2000). Far less attention has been directed toward the study of forecasts for assessing tourism employment (Paajanen, 1999). Rather, as noted by Ladkin (2011), studies of tourism labor tend to focus on the economic value of tourism employment, issues of labor mobility, as well as aspects of human capital accumulation, new forms of work, and gendered work roles.

Recent human resource challenges confronting many hospitality and tourism organizations are seen by some as “a failure by our predecessors to think ahead and to envisage what the tourism workforce landscape might look like is a direct contributor to contemporary woes” (Solnet, Baum, et al., 2014, p. 694). Future projections for tourism workforce requirements are critical to ensure that adequate number of employees with the appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes are available to service tourists’ demands (Witt et al., 2004). However, few examples of future workforce analysis studies exist, although notable exceptions include research in Nepal (Wanhill, 1992), South Africa (Zwane, du Plessis, & Slabbert, 2014) and Denmark (Witt et al., 2004). The study in Denmark showed estimated employment impacts in relation to forecasted international tourism demand with the greatest job growth projected to align with foreign tourist expenditure in the retail, hotel, and restaurant sectors. Employment demand forecasts were also linked to education qualification data with projected future increased expenditures by foreign tourists more likely to drive jobs requiring graduate training. More recent labor market research examined the relationships between the decrease in tourist numbers to Hawaii and the resulting drop in employment (Konan, 2011). To date, no studies have examined and compared data using environmental scanning and labor market analysis techniques to project the future workforce in tourism.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research design***

A two-stage research design was used for this study. The first part of the study used a qualitative approach to gather data using telephone interviews to obtain data from individuals on projected trends and changes in the external environment of the tourism industry. The second part of the study examined the projected characteristics of the Minnesota tourism workforce in 2020 using existing quantitative labor market data sources.

The data for the first stage of the study were collected from tourism industry leaders who, because of their senior position, were likely to be aware of the future trends impacting the industry and who also would likely have opinions on future labor force needs. The target population for this study consisted of executive directors of professional organizations and trade associations who serve the tourism industry within the State of Minnesota. These included State Tourism Offices,

festival and event associations, State Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVBs), and hotel and lodging associations. The name of these associations and their executive directors were identified by reviewing telephone directories and websites related to the Minnesota tourism industry, such as the Minnesota State Tourism Office and the Minnesota Governor's Tourism Industry Advisory Council, resulting in a final sampling frame consisting of 15 associations. The 15 executive directors, or equivalent titled position, were contacted by telephone and 10 agreed to be interviewed.

The data for the second stage of the study utilized existing secondary sources. In conducting a search for existing labor market data on workforce projections in Minnesota's tourism sector through the year 2020, the Internet search engine was utilized. Keyword combination searches such as "workforce projections," "human resources," "tourism/hospitality industry/sector," "employment," and "2020" were used to identify existing labor market analysis sources related to the tourism industry. Initially the search focused on national level data then the search was repeated with the narrowed focus to include only Minnesota specific data sources to allow for national and state-level comparison. Data files and summaries of workforce projection research were found on the websites of the U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Census Bureau. In the United States a vast amount of labor market data is produced by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), a division of the U.S. Department of Labor, although it predates the department having been established in 1886 after receiving considerable support from the labor reform movement (Goldberg & Moye, 1985). As Manser (1998) described, BLS data are also used for labor economics research and often combined with various data sets produced by other agencies. At the state level, the primary source of labor market research was the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). A search of libraries found all of the same publications (but no additional sources) in print testifying to the current electronic dissemination priorities of governmental agencies. This data from both federal and state government were reviewed to gain trend patterns on the likely size and composition of the tourism workforce for the nation and Minnesota.

### ***Instrument***

The telephone interview was guided by a semi-structured interview protocol embedded within a qualitative research tradition. Contact was made by telephone with the interview scheduled at a later time convenient for respondents. During the initial contact a letter was read that provided details of the study and assured the confidentiality of responses. No data were collected that identified an individual respondent or the organization or association in which they were employed. The survey instrument contained two main sections and each interview lasted approximately 20–25 minutes. The responses to the questions were recorded on a blank survey with detailed verbatim notes taken on the answers to the open-ended questions. The responses to the questions identifying future trends and the



anticipated HR impacts tended to be short-sentence length or bullet-point lists rather than long narrative. This made it possible to type directly into a document as the respondent provided answers to each question. After each question was answered the response was read-back to check for accuracy and to provide an opportunity for more information to be added.

The first section of the interview gathered data on likely trends and changes in the relevant external environmental sectors that might impact the future tourism workforce within the state. The external environment sectors used in this study were (1) economic; (2) demographic; (3) political and legislative; and (4) technology. As Rothwell and Kazanas (1994) noted, these four sectors are common to most environmental scanning frameworks used for human resource development planning. The interviewer asked respondents to list the major external challenges they believed would impact the Minnesota tourism industry in each of the four external environmental sectors. This approach was also used by Rothwell and Kolb (1999) in their study of workforce and workplace trends influencing the training and development field in the United States.

The second section of the interview gathered data on the possible impact the previously identified changes in each sector may have on the future tourism workforce. The human resource management and development section of the interview focused on the new knowledge, skills, and abilities employees would need in response to the changes, strategies required to ensure the future workforce was aligned to the anticipated changes, as well as potential barriers that could hinder human resource development in response to predicted external environmental changes. The questions for this section were developed based on existing literature on the identification and mitigation of perceived barriers to training participation (Brown & McCracken, 2009; Business and Economic Research Ltd., 2004; Sambrook & Stewart, 2000).

## **Analysis**

The interview responses were typed in a word document and through the process of multiple reading, the qualitative data were categorized and then coded to identify specific words and phrases that shared similar meanings. Then each response was categorized into the most relevant external environment sector: (1) economic, (2) demographic, (3) political and legislative, and (4) technology. Existing data from labor market analysis sources was not manipulated or subject to further analysis.

## **Results**

The results from the interviews collecting data on external environmental scanning are presented first followed by results from the labor market analysis data.

## ***Results from the external environmental scanning***

A number of common themes emerged from the analysis of interview data with industry leaders which were categorized into one of four pre-identified external environmental sectors. The themes are presented in the following order: economic, demographic, political and legislative, and technology.

### ***Economic sector***

The executive directors participating in the study listed a wide range of economic trends thought likely to impact Minnesota tourism before and up to 2020. The most frequently reported responses related to the condition of the domestic economy. More specifically, respondents felt that the inflation rate, indicators of consumer confidence, and the health of the stock market were major economic trends that could impact the management of tourism and hospitality organizations. These were noted as being related to the second most frequent category of responses, the economic situation in Minnesota, and especially the amount of state funded support for the tourism industry. Other economic sector trends specifically mentioned by the majority of respondents included the cost of fuel/gasoline. Lastly, the level of the minimum wage and the necessity to provide increased healthcare benefits to employees were also reported.

### ***Demographic sector***

The respondents seemed to have little difficulty in listing several projected changes in the demographic composition of the state and its tourism industry workforce. All but one respondent specifically referenced the aging population and increasing median employee age within many tourism related organizations. With a shortage of younger workers many executive directors noted the need for alternative employment arrangements including part-time work and the need to make tourism an attractive industry for baby boomers who may have previously retired from a first career but wish to remain active in the workforce. Similarly, the increasing diversity of the state and its labor force was frequently reported with the need for employees with greater cross-cultural knowledge and second language abilities. One final finding of note in this sector of the environmental scan was the absence of specific mention of immigration, both legal and illegal. The reason for this may be due to the context and setting for our research—the U.S.'s State of Minnesota. While Minnesota's illegal immigrant population increased during the 1990s and early 2000s, it has since leveled (Migration Policy Institute, 2014) with the number of illegal immigrants placing Minnesota behind 30 other states (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005).

### ***Political and legislative sector***

The assessment of the political and legislative trends likely to be most significant in their impact to the Minnesota tourism industry provided a wide range of

responses. It should be mentioned that this sector prompted long lists of responses with several participants quite passionate about many of the issues raised in this section. The issues ranged from the need to retain the current law of no sales tax on apparel in Minnesota, and the provision of wage credits for employees earning tips as a significant portion of their compensation. A number of issues surrounding the work of the Department of Homeland Security were seen as potential major impacts including the policy requirement for international visitors to have biometric passports, the intrusion of privacy with fingerprints and eye scans, and the extended time required to process visa applications. At the state level of government, major political and legislative changes were noted as potentially impacting the tradition and perceived need for the State of Minnesota to continue to support the tourism industry.

### ***Technology sector***

The responses to technological trends likely to create an impact to the tourism industry in Minnesota focused heavily on the expanded role of the Internet as a powerful communication and commercial medium. The Internet was seen as increasing its role within the industry to include an even greater web-based presence in business activities including reservations and bookings, advertising and promotions, vacation planning, and e-commerce. Many technology impacts were linked to the rise of self-service technology in hospitality and tourism (Lema, 2009). Technological advancements were also seen as reducing the cost of management and maintenance to allow employees to spend more time to focus on customer service. The need for an increasingly technology literate workforce also emerged as a key theme.

### ***Human resource assessment***

With the four segments of the external environment scanned for predicted trends, respondents were then asked for their assessment on major human resource changes likely to occur in the Minnesota tourism workforce by 2020. The majority of responses to the human resource assessment focused on issues linked to trends identified in the technology and demographic sectors. The most frequently reported responses in technology related to increasing the skills of employees with computer, and especially web-based applications, whereas the most frequent demographic changes related to the future need for employees able to both work with, and be representative of, an older and more diverse population. Examples of economic changes were also mentioned, although not as frequently, in relation to the need to offer more competitive compensation and benefit options to tourism industry employees. Two further changes are worthy of mention. The first was the suggestion from several respondents that human resources management and development professionals within the industry will be responsible for shifting the perception that those workers unable to find work in other settings gravitate toward tourism. The second issue addressed the need for human resource

management leadership to show a greater level of professionalism than that which now characterizes the industry.

When asked about the new knowledge, skills, and abilities that employees in the Minnesota tourism industry will need to possess, given the identified external changes from the environmental scan, most respondents again highlighted increased employee technological skills along with the knowledge and ability to work with people from diverse cultures and backgrounds who may not speak English as their first language. Perhaps in response to the economic changes predicted, a need for employees to understand business, marketing, and finance was also frequently mentioned. The importance of strong customer service skills was specifically mentioned as an almost accepted prerequisite to employment in the tourism and hospitality sector. The ability to adapt to a rapidly changing environment, which is likely to describe the tourism industry of the future, was also seen as a key attribute needed of the 2020 workforce. An interesting observation was made by one respondent who correctly noted that tourism and hospitality has a strong history of employing persons with disabilities (e.g., Bengisu & Balta, 2011) and suggested that the industry should continue to be proud of this reputation and maintain future pathways to employment for workers with special needs.

The responses to the question of what were the best way to ensure that employees in Minnesota's tourism and hospitality industry possess the new knowledge, skills, and abilities tended to focus on formal education and training. While the majority of skill acquisition activity focused on post-secondary education and workplace learning, a great emphasis was also placed on K-12 education. One executive director suggested that teaching second languages should be mandatory in schools, whereas another stated that the industry needed to be more proactive in working with middle schools in educating and preparing students for potential tourism industry employment. The more general issue of developing partnerships between industry and education was seen by several respondents as a vital factor needed to create awareness of tourism related occupations and making tourism an industry of choice for future careers for young people.

The results from the identification of potential barriers for human resource development in response to the identified changes from the environmental scan suggested that competing priorities in the management of tourism and hospitality organizations overshadow workforce development concerns. Other significant barriers for workforce development reported, in order of frequency, were high personnel turnover, lack of time for workforce development, costs of training and developing employees, and few studies confirming benefits of workforce development programs.

## ***Results from the labor market analysis***

### ***Projected demographic and population changes***

Projected trends in population affect employment in a number of ways including the demand for goods and services as well as the corresponding changes in the size

and demographic composition of the labor force (Hecker, 2001). The U.S. Census Bureau projected that in 2020 U.S. population will have reached 341 million, up from a current estimated 308 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

For at least the last 20 years the U.S. workforce has been projected to grow to an estimated 171 million workers by 2020 with significant higher proportions of women and immigrant workers (Judy & D'Amico, 1997). The number of workers staying in the workforce after traditional retirement age is forecast to increase as work offsets increased retirement expenses and lower Social Security income. At the state level, Minnesota's population is predicted to show steady growth. The Minnesota State Demographic Center has suggested that Minnesota's population is projected to grow 15% from 5.3 million in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009) to 6.27 million by 2030 (McMurray, 2002). This growth will be fueled by immigration from other states and foreign countries and by natural increase resulting from more births than deaths. Using these data points to extrapolate, and assuming linear growth, an estimated state population of 5.76 could be expected for 2020.

### ***Projected employment outlook changes***

The BLS has made employment outlooks over a 10-year time horizon with future labor force projections made by combining estimated general population data from the U.S. Census and workforce participation projections made by the BLS. The most recent data projections for the 2012–2022 decade are summarized into three broad categories: general U.S. economic outlook projections, labor force projections, and occupational projections. Despite more recent economic events reflecting the recovery from a global recession, the BLS projections for 2022 are characterized by overall growth of the size of the labor force with 15.6 million additional workers anticipated to be added over the 2012–2022 period representing a growth rate of 10.8% (U.S. Department of Labor, BLS, 2013).

### ***Projected occupational employment changes***

Finally, the BLS analysis of occupational employment projections shows that jobs requiring postsecondary education will greatly increase. In 2008, about three in 10 jobs were in occupations that were classified in a category involving some form of post-secondary award or degree. Projections for the 2012–2022 decade identified that 19 of the 30 occupations anticipated to grow the fastest require some form of post-secondary certificate or degree for entry. These projections include many jobs and occupations in tourism and hospitality.

### ***Projected tourism and hospitality workforce changes***

When examining workforce projections in the tourism and hospitality industry the first challenge confronted was the diversity by which the industry is defined and the resulting wide range of tourism and hospitality related occupations either included or excluded in various labor market analysis data. As the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2001) noted:

The credibility and international comparability of “tourism statistics” depend heavily on: (1) a consensus regarding the choice of “tourism characteristic industries”, i.e. those industries on which tourism demand has the most important direct impact, and an estimation of the “tourism ratio” of their output; as well as (2) the methods used to calculate the indirect effects on the output of many other industries. Statistical presentations differ in whether they include such indirect or induced effects in the measurement of tourism in the economy. (p. 7)

Despite these challenges facing human resource planners there is a degree of agreement about current employment figures and projected future employment growth in the tourism sector. In 2011, the tourism industry was estimated to provide 5,678,000 jobs representing 4.1% of total U.S. employment (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2011). This was estimated to increase to 6,546,000 jobs (4.0% of total employment) by 2022. However, the total contribution of travel and tourism to employment, including jobs indirectly supported by the industry, is significantly larger. By some estimates the number of jobs in the travel and tourism sector is 14.7 million (10.5% of total U.S. employment) with 1.7% growth projected to achieve 17.5 million jobs and (11% of total U.S. employment) by 2021.

Tourism is a key sector of Minnesota’s economy, currently generating \$11.3 billion annually and providing full-time employment for approximately 250,000 private sector jobs (DEED, 2014). The tourism industry is classified by DEED as part of leisure and hospitality division of the state economy which includes jobs in the eating and drinking, lodging, amusement, and recreation sectors as defined by the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) system. Separating out the number of people employed specifically within tourism and hospitality created difficulty based on this definition and how labor market data is tracked within SIC categories. The current number represents approximately 11% of all the jobs in Minnesota’s economy—a percentage that has remained fairly consistent over the last decade (DEED, 2014). On the whole, tourism related jobs in Minnesota are found in a range of businesses that include everything from small, owner-managed resorts to national hotel chains.

While a degree of uncertainty exists over the exact current size of the tourism workforce, a clearer indication of future staffing needs was present in data projecting Minnesota industries likely to experience the greatest changes in terms of the numbers employed between the years 2010 to 2020. Minnesota’s traditional strong primary produce and extractive industrial sectors (farming, fishing, and forestry) are projected to show minimal job growth; whereas the leisure and hospitality industry was projected to be the seventh most rapidly growing sector in the state in terms of the number of new jobs created between 2010 and 2020 (DEED, 2014). This growth projection represents a 7.9% change in the number of jobs across the 10-year period and an estimated 22,363 new jobs in tourism and hospitality. In summary, the examination of labor market data showed that while Minnesota’s population will continue to grow at 8.6% creating job growth in all economic sectors, the service sector in general was projected to experience almost 18% growth

with significant growth in both replacement and new jobs anticipated in leisure, tourism, and hospitality.

### ***Comparison of data from environmental scanning and labor market analysis***

When comparing results from the external environmental scanning interview data to the secondary labor market analysis data, similarities emerged on the general pattern of anticipated economic and demographic changes to the tourism industry and its 2020 workforce in Minnesota. The interviews with executive directors produced far more specific information than labor market sources in terms of the projected changes in each environmental sector. Furthermore, the interview format for environmental scanning also provided a mechanism to identify human resource management and development actions needed in response to externally driven changes. The advantage of the labor market analysis method was the detailed, specific, quantitative data generated. An additional advantage was the consistency in the selected measures that allows for comparisons across time to identify trends. The broad scope of this data at either a national or regional, in this case the State of Minnesota, provided a common metric in quantitative terms to compare projected changes against current information.

### **Discussion**

Research continues to support the claim that human resource planning is crucial to the success of tourism and hospitality organizations; yet evidence shows workforce planning is not widely applied (Saad, 2013). The overall aim of this study was to investigate the projected profile of the tourism workforce in Minnesota in the year 2020 while comparing the results of two methods for strategic human resource workforce planning. The first research objective was to determine the views of leaders of Minnesota tourism associations on anticipated changes in population, labor force size, and composition and the external environmental trends likely to impact the tourism industry and its workforce in the year 2020. The results identified anticipated changes in the economy, demography, technology, and well as in the political and legislative sector of the external environment with respondents also predicting impacts to the human resources employed in tourism and hospitality organizations in Minnesota. The identification of future trends in hospitality and tourism remains a focus for researchers (Hobson, 2010; Kapiki, 2012; Sharp-ley, 2011) although few studies explicitly connect data-derived trend analysis to human resource planning.

The second research objective was to identify tourism industry workforce projections in 2020 in terms of population forecasts; predicted labor force analysis; and external environmental trends likely to impact the tourism industry and its workforce. Utilizing a broad range of secondary-data sources the labor market analysis highlighted that projected demographic, employment, and occupational changes are anticipated to create opportunities for expansion for the tourism

workforce in Minnesota. The results also identified that secondary data sources for labor market analysis do exist but perhaps not always in a format or structure that allows easy translation or application for those interested in tourism workforce projections (Liu & Wall, 2006). Ladkin (2011) recently commented that “investigation into why tourism labor is still a relatively scarce area of research reveals no obvious clues, although a lack of reliable employment data, problems of definition and the cost of empirical data collection all have some bearing” (p. 1136). From the findings of this study it appears that the tourism industry in Minnesota lags behind many other industry sectors in labor market research data collection and analysis needed to forecast long-term workforce changes. A greater amount of available data and workplace planning is evidenced in other occupations outside of tourism that are also experiencing projected employee shortages in the face of significant external environmental change. For example, a variety of occupations in the information technology industry have far more detailed information available that combines both labor market data and results from environmental scanning from education, business, and industry association leaders (Agrawal, Tenkorang, Agrawal, & Taylor, 2009).

The third research objective of this study was to compare the outcomes from data collected from industry experts to secondary labor market analysis. The results indicated that somewhat different yet complementary findings emerged for researchers and human resource planners seeking to anticipate the future size and characteristics for a regional tourism workforce. Both human resource planning approaches highlight the potential for significant shortages in the number of workers with the required skills to meet the needs of tourism industry employers. As organizational leaders increasingly value projections of major impacts to their current and future human resources (Chung-Herrera, Enz, Lankau, 2003; Ulrich, 1997) managers will no doubt strive for identifying optimal data sources and human resource planning methods.

Recent research on environmental scanning has shown that little attention is systematically directed toward identification of external trends despite recognition of increased volatility in the external environment (Mayer, Steinecke, Quick, & Weitzel, 2013; Wong & Hung, 2012). Organizations in the tourism and hospitality sector have been identified as having a great need for environmental scanning due to the scope and magnitude of change, yet, potentially, the process may be more complex and difficult when compared to other occupations (Okumus, 2004). The results of this study highlighted that a survey of industry leaders combined with secondary labor market data can identify economic, demographic, technological, and legislative trends with corresponding potential impacts projected on the number, structure, and characteristics of current and future jobs in tourism related occupations. This information can be applied at an organizational level or in the case of this study, at the level of a region. These findings may be especially useful for regions, such as Minnesota, that heavily rely on tourism employment.



Lastly, the findings of this study suggest that Minnesota lags behind other regions and nations that have invested considerable resources into workforce planning despite the challenges of data collection that long range human resource planning in this ill-defined industry presents. However, the results from this study in Minnesota seem to corroborate that with effort and multiple data sources that existing gaps in workforce planning practices can be addressed or reduced. For example, completed tourism workforce plans can be found in increasing numbers from diverse global locations including Hawaii (University of Hawaii at Mānoa, 2007) and the Asia and the Pacific region (Solnet, Baum, et al., 2014).

## Conclusions and implications

The results of this study showed that interviewed industry leaders were able to identify predicted trends and changes in the economy, demography, technology, as well as in the political and legislative sector of the external environment and the corresponding impacts these may have for current and future human resources employed in tourism and hospitality organizations in Minnesota. The results from the labor market analysis identified population forecasts and predicted labor force changes in tourism and hospitality. Comparing the results from both methods highlighted the different type of data with richer descriptive trend identification and human resource implications adding to the quantitative projections of changes in the size and characteristics of the hospitality and tourism employment sector. In conclusion, a combined approach of external environmental scanning with labor market analysis data may offer the optimal benefit for organizational managers and regional tourism planners conducting workforce planning from a strategic human resource management perspective.

The adoption of a strategic human resource management approach in hospitality and tourism organizations is increasing (Harrington et al., 2014) with a growing acceptance, confirmed by research, of positive performance outcomes (Taylor & Finley, 2008). A rising number of researchers, industry associations, and tourism dependent economies now recognize the need for accurate data on future workforce projections (Witt et al., 2004). Yet to date there have been few studies that have examined the most frequently used methods and the comparative data produced from each method. One major finding from this study with implications for practice was the difficulty in obtaining accurate information despite the often reported need to proactively strategically plan for future human resource issues within the tourism industry (Harrington & Ottenbacher, 2011). The current situation of multiple types of data available from numerous sources requires a commitment and persistence to gather, analyze, and interpret data for future strategic human resource planning. An awareness and understanding of the need for ongoing data collection and the challenges involved for tourism workforce planning could be a first step for many tourism organizations not currently engaged in systematic workforce planning. Efforts to establish a centralized clearing house for

data on projected external environmental changes and their anticipated impact on the current and future tourism workforce may be a valuable exercise for large organizations, professional associations, or cities, regions, and nations heavily dependent on having the right number of tourism and hospitality employees with needed knowledge, skills, and abilities. An additional implication for managerial practice based on the findings from this study would be the development of professional development opportunities and the design of training programs for currently employed staff aligned with the identified trends emanating from the external environment.

The findings from this study show that significant external environmental are likely to have major impacts on human resources employed in tourism related occupations. The importance of people for the delivery of high quality tourism experiences and services requires managers and leaders to commit to strategic processes that identify future changes, likely human resource implications, and the development of actionable human resource management and development plans (Saad, 2013). Initial priority areas related to demographic shifts and emerging new technologies could represent a starting point for application and future research given the wealth of secondary data and detail that emerged from these sectors during the environmental scanning interviews. Studies on organizational outcomes for tourism firms that align their workforce planning strategies in response to projected demographic and technology changes is an additional area of future research. This would build on earlier calls for testing models of strategic planning effectiveness in tourism (Phillips & Moutinho, 2000), and extend the findings from more recent empirical studies (Avci, Madanoglu, & Okumus, 2011) to provide important new knowledge for the study of strategic human resource management in tourism and hospitality.

The results of this study indicate that a combined method approach to human resource development planning may be better than selecting either an external environmental scanning or a labor market analysis approach alone. While fraught with difficulties and limitations in their implementation, existing forecasting models for tourism related and tourism generated employment need further development (Sirakaya, Choi, & Var, 2002; Smeral, 2003; Solnet, Baum, et al., 2014). Researchers from tourism and hospitality, economics, education, and management along with human resource management practitioners from industry should play a key role in conducting further studies that lead to the evolution and refinement of workforce planning models and forecasting techniques. The importance of tourism to the economic vitality of regions, states, and nations, should encourage government and foundations to fund grant-sponsored research in this area where the outcome is likely to assist both individual organizations and the industry as a whole.

### **Future research and limitations**

Future research would also benefit from studies examining scanning methods and labor market analysis techniques compared to alternative workforce planning

approaches such as scenario planning. Scenario planning would seem to be well-suited for inclusion in workforce planning efforts in tourism (Solnet, Baum, et al., 2014) as this method for forecasting uses strategic intelligence from the economic, political, environmental, cultural, and technological domains along with consideration of past trends, predicted future events, the role of main actors, and critical uncertainties of the social system (Ruona, Lynham, & Chermack, 2003).

The limitations of this study need to be recognized when considering the findings. The primary limitations are related to the study setting in a single U.S. state and the small sample size of executive directors. However, any potential bias may be minimal given the total population of these positions, the open-ended qualitative approach to environmental scanning used in the study, and the need for individuals in this role to be extremely knowledgeable about external environmental trends and their potential impact to their industry. The unknown accuracy of as-reported labor market analysis data is an additional limitation. In the present era of rapid external environmental change impacting human resources within the tourism workforce (Baum, 2007; Solnet, Baum, et al., 2014) two things are clear: the old rules regarding recruiting, retaining, and training employees no longer work, and no one is certain what the new rules will be. Yet, as Handy (1989) famously observed, “the future we predict today is not inevitable. We can influence it, if we know what we want it to be” (p. xi).

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