#### THE BENEFITS OF TRAINING

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This study assesses whether hospitality employees consider workplace training is adequate and identifies management's view on the importance of training. Links between inadequate training and problems such as sexual harassment, unfair dismissals, under-staffing, poor food hygiene, and theft are also identified. Results indicate that hospitality employees are commonly required to work without sufficient training, and that training has a positive effect on employee relations by reducing workplace problems and improving staff retention.

**Key Words:** hospitality, workplace problems, training, dismissal, turnover.

#### INTRODUCTION

Personal experience and comments from under-graduate students suggest that some hospitality supervisors expect new staff to acquire skills with minimal assistance, and those who do not, may be unsuited to their roles. Such expectations can result in poor training, unfair dismissals for those who require extensive training, and high staff turnover. Research was needed to confirm or refute the relationship between these and other workplace issues, and offer a rationale for investing in staff training other than to meet the immediate demands of service encounters.

Perhaps because training is labour intensive, some workplaces use unskilled employees as trainers or leave employees to their own devices to 'learn as they go'. While this might appear to alleviate workloads of supervisors and managers, in fact it increases them, as staff may learn incorrect or inappropriate techniques, leading to poor customer service and other workplace problems. Although it seems logical that causal relationships between inadequate training, unfair dismissals and staff turnover will exist, a literature search indicated that these relationships had not been examined in any depth prior to this study. Data collected in this study indicate that those who work where training is inadequate also work where theft and sexual harassment proliferate, and where staff turnover is high. These associations suggest that workplace problems can be reduced by improving training, which will also improve skill levels, therefore facilitating the attainment of excellence so highly sought by customers and industry providers alike.

# BACKGROUND

Some hospitality managers are reluctant to invest in training in case staff leave (Davies, Taylor, & Savery, 2001; Jameson, 2000; Loe, Ferrell, & Mansfield, 2000; Lowry, Simon, & Kimberley, 2002), or because their time is already fully occupied with recruitment and selection. Performing a task publicly without adequate skill is likely to jeopardise service quality, and demean and embarrass employees, yet anecdotal evidence suggests inadequate training is common, and employees are frequently compromised by and censured for, their inability to perform. Training and development affects job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Lam & Zhang, 2003; Lowry et al. 2002; Pratten, 2003; Smith, 2002; Taylor, Davies, & Savery, 2001), which in turn affect staff retention. Many researchers also link training to service quality (Maxwell, Watson, & Quail, 2004), a link that would not be difficult to substantiate. However, hotels that provide inadequate training exacerbate staff turnover, thereby jeopardising quality standards, profitability, and any hope of excellence.

This study assesses whether or not hospitality employees consider training is adequate and identifies management's view on the importance of training, as a way of determining the root cause of training problems. Links between inadequate training and workplace problems such as staff turnover, theft, and sexual harassment are also identified. Results presented in this paper are part of a doctoral study on hospitality workplace problems, particularly those with implications for ethical standards.



#### **METHODOLOGY**

Following two pilot studies, a questionnaire designed to identify relationships between workplace problems and demographic characteristics was distributed amongst staff, supervisors and managers in 27 Auckland (New Zealand) hospitality-related workplaces. These workplaces included food services premises, nightclubs, bars, three, four, and five star hotels, and the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) School of Hospitality. Most questions used a four or five point Likert scale, but some open-ended questions were added to solicit qualitative data. Questionnaires were self-completed, producing 534 usable responses. Of the 1848 distributed, 523 (28%) were returned as reusable, 782 (42%) lost, and 543 (29%) completed. Data were collected in 2003.

Likert-scale questions used different sets of graded response according to the question. Responses to questions on the perceived incidence of specific problems were 'never', 'once or twice', 'commonly', 'frequently', 'all the time', 'does not apply', and 'don't know'. Questions on management's perceived acceptance of problems described the behaviour (e.g., 'staff working without proper training') and asked respondents to rate their perception of the organisation's attitude. Alternatives offered were 'standard practice', 'encouraged', 'allowed', 'not allowed', 'something management is actively trying to stop', 'does not apply', 'don't know'.

Responses were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), and statistical significance tested using chi-square analyses and eta. Consistent with conventional social science practice (Hie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, & Bent, 1975), relationships with a probability of five percent or less of occurring, were generally taken as statistically significant. Chi square values of less than .05 were therefore taken as indications that the variables were independent; that is, data were not distributed according to statistical expectations. Eta was used to test the strength of associations between two sets of variables. Eta is a measure ranging from 0 to 1, with 1 indicating the highest level of association. Statistically significant values were taken as those over .1.

# **RESULTS**

The analysis of demographic variables by respondents' seniority revealed a large workforce of inexperienced, poorly educated and poorly paid young people, managed by a small group of better educated, older, European males. This profile was reinforced by the analysis of demographic variables by department, which revealed associations between the demographic characteristics of respondents and the departments in which they worked. Results suggested that:

- The Auckland hospitality industry is dominated by women (approximately 60%), except in the over 30 age group, which is dominated by men.
- Many hospitality workers (40%) have no formal qualifications, although in this study many had university entrance qualifications, reflecting the strong student population in the sample.
- In 2003, most staff (57%) were paid under \$NZ15.00 an hour, had fewer than five years in their present position (87%), were part-time workers (52%) and worked in food and beverages (58%).
- The short employment lengths of many respondents (87% under five years) were thought to be associated with training and staffing issues that were also evident.

## **Poor Training**

Respondents were asked how often staff had to work without proper training in their workplace. Of valid responses, 37% said this was a regular occurrence, and a further 39% said it had happened once or twice. Ethnicity, seniority, pay, department and business type were all associated with inadequate training (although ethnicity was strongly associated with department, it was also isolated as a strong influence on responses on training).

Seniority was analysed as staff, supervisor or manager, and job security, as casual, part-time, full-time or salaried employee. Although not strongly significant, a comparison of mean responses (Table 1) indicated that supervisors were those most likely to consider training inadequate, and managers, least likely (significant to a level of .088, eta of .122).

Supervisors, those paid between \$15 and \$19.95, food and beverage workers, front office workers, and those working in hotels (as opposed to food and beverage businesses) were those most likely to consider training was inadequate. Although age did not strongly influence responses, each of the influential demographic variables was associated with young workers (18 – 25 years old) in food and beverage and front office positions.



Table 1 presents comparisons of mean responses on the incidence of various workplace issues, according to the seniority of respondents. Where differences between responses from staff, supervisors and managers were not statistically significant (indicated by a low et a level), the overall mean response only is presented.

Means Comparison of Actual and Perceived Incidence by Seniority

1 = Never	Sexual	Unfair	Under-	Poor	Food	Theft
3 = All the time	harassment	dismissal	staffing	training	on floor	
Seniority (eta)	.091	.194	.060	.122	.164	.093
Staff		1.82		2.14	1.28	
Supervisor		1.98		2.21	1.37	
Manager		1.53		2.07	1.10	
Overall	1.32	1.53	2.43	2.12	1.25	2.08

Even though management was perceived by some (28%) as trying to overcome training problems, a significant proportion (45%) thought inadequate training was either standard practice, encouraged, or allowed. The remainder (27%) thought poor training was not allowed. Poor training was widely perceived as accepted by management, as opposed to (for example) illegal alcohol service, which was perceived as very strongly opposed.

Written responses about training identified three major themes: poor training, misuse of the concept of on-the-job training, and the frequency of and support for sink-or-swim workplace initiations. While on-the-job training is an effective method when trained trainers are used, qualitative data indicated that the concept of onthe-job training is widely abused, and the buddy system and other 'show as you go' methods implemented as cheap substitutes. In essence, the only similarity between these and proper on-the-job training, is that they are both conducted in the workplace. Formal on-the-job training is usually conducted by the same trainer each time, and is undertaken in the workplace only because the appropriate props are available, rather than to meet the pressures of work. Being 'thrown in the deep end' appeared to be a frightening and bewildering experience for many respondents, and one which (to extend the swimming metaphor further), can only result in faulty techniques that merely raise 'trainees' above the surface, gasping for air with neither dignity nor grace.

# **Workplace Problems associated with Poor Training**

Sexual harassment, unfair dismissal, under-staffing, poor food hygiene and theft were all perceived to occur commonly in areas where training was poor. The following sections outline the severity of these problems, and the relationship between each problem and training.

## **Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment in hospitality is of legendary proportions. In a Massachusetts study, Eller (1990) found sexual harassment significantly more common in hospitality than elsewhere, and in another American study, Woods and Kavanaugh (1994) found that managers acknowledged harassment to be a pervasive industry problem. Hoel's doctoral dissertation (2002), a study of bullying and harassment in the United Kingdom, found that 24% of respondents had experienced unwanted sexual attention at work, by far the highest figure of any other participating sector. In another British study, Worsfold and McCann (2000) found 57% of hospitality students returning from supervised work experience had been sexually harassed.

In this study, 24% of respondents reported they had been sexually harassed, the same proportion as identified in Hoel's (2002) study. Gilbert, Guerrier and Guy (1998) analysed responses from 32 American personnel managers, and found 29% considered sexual jokes and teasing a minor issue, compared with 22% in this study, who were either in agreement with, or neutral towards, sexual jokes and teasing.

Poor training was identified as a strong predictor of sexual harassment, and where respondents had their own codes of ethics, sexual harassment was significantly less prevalent. Whereas some hospitality organisations train wait staff to use physical contact (such as touching a customer's arm) to improve tips, teaching them how to reject sexual advances without being offensive, would help reduce harassment, absenteeism, and turnover.

## **Unfair (Constructive) Dismissal**

Constructive dismissals (changing employees' working conditions with the intention of forcing a resignation) are unfair, unethical, and in many countries, illegal. In New Zealand, inappropriate dismissals for



misconduct, poor performance, and redundancy, cost employers \$12 million a year in personal grievance claims (Tritt, 2004). Constructive dismissals are endemic in commercial hospitality, and inflicted by supervisors inadequately equipped for their responsibilities (Poulston, 2005).

Unfair dismissals (described in the questionnaire as supervisors writing unfair rosters and hassling staff to get rid of them) occurred commonly in the workplaces of 22% of respondents to this study, and to 37% of those employed on a casual basis (statistically significant to a level of .005).

Management was perceived as generally tolerant of unfair dismissals, with around a third (34%) of all respondents thinking that unfair dismissals were allowed, and only 12% believing that managers were trying to stop the practice. Seniority was the only independent variable strongly associated with the likelihood of believing unfair dismissals were allowed (statistically significant to a level of .002). Most supervisors said that unfair dismissals were allowed, with 52% reporting this, including 14% who said unfair dismissals were standard practice where they worked. Of the 37 management respondents, 70% said that writing unfair rosters and hassling staff to get them to leave was not allowed, and 8% said managers were trying to stop this practice. However, 21% of managers said unfair dismissals were standard practice, allowed, or even encouraged. Of those in staff positions, 35% said unfair dismissals were allowed. Those most likely to think that unfair dismissals were allowed were supervisors, full-time and part-time workers, and those with the least experience (and presumably, therefore, the least training). Those least likely to think unfair dismissals were allowed, were experienced salaried workers in management positions.

The incidence of unfair dismissals reported by managers was inconsistent with levels reported by staff and supervisors, indicating that managers were either substantially unaware of unfair dismissals in their workplaces, or reluctant to admit to them. The high incidence of unfair dismissals reported by supervisors implicates them as the primary cause, partly because managers seemed unaware of this practice, but also, because staff have insufficient influence and authority to dismiss. Unfair dismissals were reported most by casual employees and least by salaried employees, suggesting casual staff are the primary victims. Those reporting the highest levels of unfair dismissals were inexperienced full-time and casual workers, and supervisors. Unfair dismissals occurred most where under-staffing, poor training, poor food hygiene and theft also occurred.

## **Under-staffing and Staff Turnover**

Hospitality's problem with recruitment, retention, and therefore under-staffing is well documented and well recognised (e.g. Baum, 2002; Brien, 2004; Choi, Woods, & Murrmann, 2000; Gustafson, 2002; Jameson, 2000), and solutions offered vary. Ulrich, Halbrook, Meder, Stuchlik and Thorpe (1991) found high employee turnover negatively affected customer satisfaction, and Simons and Hinkin found staff turnover to be 'strongly associated with decreased profits' (2001:67). Staff turnover is a persistent problem in hospitality, and results from this study indicate that the New Zealand industry is not immune.

In this study, 87% of respondents had held their current position for fewer than five years. As 35% were 20 to 24 years old, the probable age of many tertiary students, this percentage was not at first considered typical. However, when data from this age group were removed, the proportion adjusted only to 80%. Of those who stated their exact length of service (n = 192), the median stay was one year (i.e. half the sample had been in their jobs less than a year). This represents a turnover rate of 50%; i.e. each position changes twice a year.

Short lengths of employment were common for food and beverages workers and front office workers (93% had held their positions for fewer than five years). Those with the highest turnover were casual workers, of whom 98% had held their positions for fewer than five years. The relationships between length of service and both department and job security were significant to a level of .000. Turnover was lowest amongst supervisors, of whom 76% reported they had been fewer than five years in their present position, compared with 80% of managers, and an overwhelming 90% of staff (significant to a level of .001). However, it is likely that supervisors, rather than being a low turnover group per se, find their way into supervisory roles by staying longest. Turnover was noticeably lower for full-time employees (72%). Under-staffing was predicted by poor training, unfair dismissals, and low pay, and was strongly associated with theft. Under-staffing was not perceived as strongly opposed by management, and was associated with the view that management allowed under-staffing and poor training.

# **Poor Food Hygiene**

Food hygiene is self-regulating, as restaurants that poison their customers are generally discovered and the problem rectified by closure or the implementation of procedural changes. Persistent poor food hygiene can



therefore be regarded as occurring against all odds, including legal constraints, staff and management attitudes, and customer complaints. Causes of poor food hygiene in hospitality are likely to be negligence, the quest for profit, violations of food safety codes (Walczak & Reuter, 2004), lack of knowledge of food safety practices (Klara, 1999), and poor training (Lynch, Elledge, Griffith, & Boatright, 2003).

Answers to questions on food hygiene indicated that 21% of respondents thought food had been served after being on the floor, a proportion consistent with that in Ghiselli and Ismail's American study (1999), in which 18% of respondents agreed with serving food that had been on the floor. Previous findings that poor food safety was associated with training inadequacies (Klara, 1999; Lynch et al. 2003) were also supported in this study, as poor training was strongly associated with poor food hygiene. Poor training, unfair dismissal, and theft, were strong predictors of poor food hygiene, as was the view that management accepted poor food hygiene standards.

#### **Workplace Theft**

Although theft was ostensibly opposed by many respondents, it emerged as a persistent problem that could be reduced by vigorous opposition from management, but probably not eliminated. Employee theft relates to the way employees feel about their employer and workplace (Adams, 1963), and is therefore less prevalent where managers are is perceived more as a means of support than as adversaries. Employee theft affects prices, profits and employee wages (Pankratz, 2000; Wanhill, 1994), thereby contributing to the tight operating margins that can constrain training and development. Theft was associated with staff turnover by Thoms, Wolper, Scott and Jones (2001), and Withiam (1996), as well as in this study, which found under-staffing was associated more with theft than with any other dependent variable.

The perception that theft was occurring was also associated with the perception that training was poor, and that management allowed poor training. That is, of those who said theft occurred regularly in their workplace, 57% also said training was poor, and 52% said management allowed poor training. The perception that other workplace problems occurred also suggested the presence of theft, and management's perceived acceptance of theft.

## **MULTI-VARIATE ANALYSES**

The perception that training was poor was strongly associated with the presence of other workplace problems, as outlined in the preceding section. The relationships between the dependent variables were therefore analysed, to isolate the influential factor affecting workplace problems. As presented in Table 2 (for example), responses on sexual harassment were associated with responses on training. That is, those who said they had been harassed, also said training was poor where they worked.

Table 2 Analysis of Variance: The Relationships between Workplace Problems

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables: Eta Values							
Incidence of:	Sexual	Unfair	Under-	Poor	Poor food	Theft		
	harassment	dismissal	staffing	training	hygiene			
Sexual harassment		.203	.114	.186	.066	.203		
Unfair dismissal	.199		.253	.389	.230	.328		
Under-staffing	.112	.260		.351	.147	.363		
Poor training	.203	.390	.347		.276	.277		
Poor food hygiene	.067	.232	.147	.256		.303		
Theft	.185	.329	.365	.263	.334			

Although the analysis of variance confirms that workplace problems are inter-related, it does not conclusively isolate the central issue. A Principal Component Analysis of dependent variables using Kaiser Normalisation was therefore undertaken, revealing that poor training (followed by under-staffing) had the highest loading against the other dependent variables. Although this identifies poor training as the central factor, under-staffing and poor training are very likely inextricably linked. Attempts to isolate one as the cause of the other, while statistically pleasing, is therefore probably not important.

# DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Hospitality workplaces in this study were perceived by respondents as providing inadequate training.



This combined with the prevalence of unfair dismissals and critical staff shortages also evident, suggests a poorly managed workforce and a poorly managed industry generally. Adequate training was strongly associated with low staff turnover, and is a common requirement of formal disciplinary processes when poor staff performance is a cause for discipline.

Training and development affects organisational commitment (Chiang, Back, & Canter, 2005; Lam & Zhang, 2003; Lowry et al. 2002; Pratten, 2003; Smith, 2002; Taylor et al. 2001) which affects staff retention. Although managers in this study strongly opposed poor training, staff generally perceived managers as unsupportive of their training needs. Poor training was associated with sexual harassment, unfair dismissal, under-staffing, poor food hygiene and theft. The particularly strong relationships between under-staffing, unfair dismissal and inadequate training suggest that if staff were better trained, they would stay longer, and be treated more fairly by their supervisors. Poorly trained staff are likely to behave in an ad hoc manner, leading to workplace problems such as theft, poor food hygiene, illegal alcohol service, unfair dismissal, and sexual harassment. It therefore makes economic sense to provide training merely to avoid the complications and consequences of negative behaviours.

#### Recommendations

Managers who invest in their businesses by training employees are likely to reap benefits beyond the advantages of improving staff retention. The hospitality industry is largely comprised of young, inexperienced women, supervised by older and better educated male managers. The onus is on these managers to recognise the responsibility of their roles, by making use of their wisdom and experience to mentor, train, and perhaps offer some degree of pastoral care. Such a commitment to staff can only result in the reduction of the kind of workplace problems that stand in the way of excellence. Hospitality workplaces would also benefit from the use of training programmes supportive of positive human relations, such as courses in self-esteem, employment law, ethics, and assertiveness.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to uncover the reality behind the facades of glamour and excitement in an industry that makes a positive social and economic contribution internationally. However, findings were worse than anticipated, worse than those in the industry realise, and probably worse than many people will want to know. There are some disturbing incongruities, such as management's support of unfair dismissals and poor training, while ostensibly puzzling over critical staffing shortages and high staff turnover. It was disappointing to confirm the findings of authors such as Stevens (2001), that human nature is to protect possessions at all costs, and before people. Respondents to this study were significantly more averse to theft than to working in smoke or sexual harassment, and the congruence between overtly illegal activities (such as theft, illegal alcohol service and poor food hygiene), and the reduced incidence of these problems, suggests that the law and social consensus are strong influences on ethical decision making.

Other factors such as the personalities and the demographic profile of hospitality workers, also contribute to workplace problems. Organisation-personality congruence (Judge & Cable, 1997) is likely to affect workplace problems in hospitality, as the very people who find this industry so attractive, are also those likely to enjoy smoking, drinking, gambling, partying, and dining out. Such activities are often enjoyed by young people attracted to the lively nature of hospitality work, but who often lack the skills needed to defend themselves against sexual harassment and unfair dismissals. The effect on the industry is that older and cannier managers can exploit a young and enthusiastic labour force, and the effect on profitability is the cost of high staff turnover as the enthusiasm wanes. While some turnover is unsolvable – that is, as young people mature, many will also grow out of the industry – some of it is also redeemable. Workers treated with respect will stay longer, perhaps even making a career out of work that has an engaging appeal to those who enjoy a stimulating environment.

# Limitations

As collection of data from hotels and restaurants proved difficult, almost half the responses were from students, resulting in data skewed to younger age groups and shorter lengths of employment. However, as 31% of Auckland hotels surveyed by Milne et al. (2004) stated that half their staff were under 25, use of student data in this study is not considered to have invalidated the findings.

Further research is recommended to confirm the strength of the relationship between training and behaviours such as theft and unfair dismissal, and may find that improving training will improve ethical standards generally.



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