

University-Industry Collaboration in Hospitality Education: The Sunway Experience

The development of hospitality education has been traditionally deep-rooted in a vocational foundation based on an amalgamation of skills and practices. Over the years, hospitality education has also been gradually regarded as part of business studies with the inclusion of many business and management subjects. As the knowledge of hospitality is closely associated with industry development, there is an increasing proclivity towards a professional orientation of its study. The expectation to strengthen the interaction between the education providers and the industry to achieve a win-win situation has been rising.

There are three main reasons for strengthening the university-industry collaboration. Firstly, the need of bridging the gap between academic institutions and industry in education, experience delivered, and the 'real world' practice. This is essential in developing a curriculum that embeds sound theoretical knowledge and contemporary industry-relevant competencies as the basis of hospitality education, both skills and knowledge, draws strongly from studies generated directly from the industry and the world of work. Secondly, the need for informed decision on contemporary business and management issues and challenges, given the highly competitive and rapidly changing environment in which the hospitality sectors operates. Lastly, the need to augment the traditional university's role of teaching and research to commercialization as more and more universities are moving towards an entrepreneurial university model.

The scope of university-industry collaboration in hospitality education

could potentially include the following:

- Contribution and participation in student activities such as field visits and guest lectures, these will not only enrich the students' learning experience but also allow students to understand the industry requirements and expectations.
- Student internship and career placement are the most commonly seen activities of university-industry collaboration. These have been driven mainly due to the need to develop a skilled workforce, and recruit potential employees who meet the industry standards. In Sunway School of Hospitality, internship is a compulsory component for all programmes offered, and career placement events are also being organized annually for students to explore employment opportunities within the industry.
- Engagement in curriculum development and delivery is also becoming a very crucial aspect of university-industry collaboration due to the need to design a curriculum that bridges the gap between academia and industry in educational delivery. As part of the Sunway School of Hospitality's academic governance, an external advisory committee has been established and supported by prominent industry members to provide guidance in curriculum development and delivery.
- Consultancy and research activities. Given the need for the hotel industry to respond swiftly and effectively to business challenges for future sustainability, there are opportunities for institutions to provide meaningful and relevant academic research to facilitate informed business decision. On the other hand, academics also need industry support to contextualize

their research as well as to facilitate data collection. Industries can benefit from the rigor of academic research to explore and resolve issues related to industry development and changes, without paying an exorbitant fee for commercial market research.

School of Hospitality at Sunway University has enjoyed the benefits of being a member of a big conglomerate with diversified businesses and the School has been proactively in seeking and establishing links with the Sunway Group's hospitality businesses such as Sunway Resorts and Hotels and Sunway Theme Park to create collaborative opportunities for its staff and students. These joint efforts encompass the scope discussed above, with some areas stronger than others. Creating such a win-win situation using university-industry collaboration demands a strategic decision and commitment from both the institution and the industry. Sunway School of Hospitality is committed to continue to build industry collaboration not only with Sunway Group's hospitality businesses but also with other international and local hospitality corporations. We believe that these relationships need to be managed and nurtured on a long term basis so as to produce the mutual benefits of improving the performance of the industry, as well as enhancing the reputation of the institutions. ■

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