Tourism Management Profiles: Implications for Tourism Education

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Abstract
Studies of state tourism directors and convention and visitor bureau directors show that there is a need for organized tourism management educations. The author discusses these studies and how they can be used in the development of tourism management education.

Keywords
R.M. O’Halloran, Tourism Management Profiles: Implications for Tourism Education, Curriculum, Convention Visitor Bureau, Directors

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Tourism Management Profiles: Implications for Tourism Education

by

R.M. O'Halloran

Studies of state tourism directors' and convention and visitor bureau directors show that there is a need for organized tourism management education. The author discusses these studies and how they can be used in the development of tourism management education.

Tourism management is a difficult concept to understand. There are no universally accepted definitions of tourism. One could question how to manage something that cannot be defined. State tourism directors have received little attention in the literature. Generally, articles concerning state tourism directors (STO) or agencies concern budget or revenue figures for a state. References in the literature to convention and visitor bureau directors (VBD) are few, generally announcements of the appointment of a new director or of how to attract groups and conventions. Additional articles focus on the economic impact of the convention and visitor business and the role the convention and visitor bureaus have played in that process. There has been little research conducted concerning either state tourism directors or convention and visitor bureau directors as managers.

Rovelstad stated that there is a lack of a strong educational infrastructure for tourism. The purpose of the study was to examine the backgrounds of state tourism directors and convention and visitor bureau directors, both practically and academically, to assess their perceptions concerning management resources, skills, abilities, and interactions with various tourism publics. The outcome of these analyses will serve as a framework for development of a tourism management curriculum. This does not imply that the curriculum will be developed solely on the basis of the perceived needs of these professionals, but these results will be used as a guide to develop a curriculum that would assist tourism managers to succeed. Professional tourism managers will refer to individuals in those occupations followed by individuals, normally after a long period of formal education or training, which are based on a well defined area of knowledge, i.e., state tourism directors and convention and visitor bureau directors.

These studies are descriptive. Nominal and ordinal data were collected. Mail surveys were distributed to state tourism directors and convention and visitor bureau directors throughout the country using...
the Travel Industry of America listing of state tourism offices and the International CVB Association membership directory as sampling frames. The state tourism directors represent a population, and this is a non-probability sample of convention and visitor bureau directors. CVB directors were selected based on cities with a population of greater than 250,000. The population of all the cities selected was greater than or equal to 283,000, noting a significant decline in the size of the next grouping of cities. Initial and follow up mailings were distributed. State tourism director responses were above 75 percent and total CVB responses were 41.6 percent.

**Backgrounds of Individuals Are Varied**

Figure 1 illustrates the backgrounds of individuals holding director positions. These positions are dominated by males over the age of 40, have been at their jobs (director) and associated with tourism for more than six years, and earn more than $40,000 per year. State Tourism Directors are more equally balanced male/female, though age, experience, and salary are very similar to the profile of the convention and visitor bureau director. Respondents were also asked to list their academic major, if they had attended college. The backgrounds of these tourism professionals are not homogeneous. Seventeen different majors were listed in the state tourism director study. Grouping the responses would list directors with backgrounds in business (accounting, economics, finance, hotel and restaurant management and management), social sciences (political science and psychology), arts, (theater, art history, romance languages, and literature), and communications (journalism, English, marketing, and mass communications). CVB directors appear to have a stronger business background.
Directors were asked to indicate their perception of importance for a variety of management resources, skills, and responsibilities on a 1 to 5 scale, very important to not important. Also noted are the percentage of respondents rating 1 or 2, signifying a level of intensity. Figure 2 lists ratings of the importance of infrastructural components.

One of the first considerations to be made by any planning body should be where hotels will be located. As expected, accommodations are considered to be the most important infrastructure component. Transportation to, from, and during the stay is also considered important, though not by 100 percent of respondents. CVB directors view retail activity and food and beverage facilities as important, with very little difference in ratings. Comparatively, state tourism directors view food and beverage as the second most important factor. Finally, security is considered only moderately important.

### Educational Levels are Important

Respondents were also asked to rate the importance of different levels of education and the highest level of education they achieved. Convention and visitor bureau directors were in agreement with state tourism directors ranking the importance and level of education. Figure 3 illustrates these rankings. The level of education obtained was also similar in both groups, with a higher level of graduate education for state tourism directors.

The percentage of respondents having a college degree or more are 76 percent and 80 percent, respectively. Therefore, people in these positions have a high level of education and an appreciation for the college experience. It is curious that these groups seem to indicate that the skills of these tourism management positions can best be obtained

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**Figure 2**

**Infrastructure Importance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infrastructure</th>
<th>Composite Mean</th>
<th>% rating 1 or 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CVB</td>
<td>STD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodations</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and Beverage</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 = very important, 2 = moderately important
Importance and Levels of Educational Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STD</th>
<th>Education Resource</th>
<th>CVB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>Previous experience</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>College degrees</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>Continuing education</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>Graduate education</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7%</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7%</td>
<td>More than high school</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34%</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2%</td>
<td>Doctoral degree</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

through management experience, and that continuing education and/or graduate education has little importance to success in the job. One might ask if this is because of the lack of tourism management education programs at colleges and universities and/or that those continuing education programs now in place are poorly received by individuals in these positions.

Directors were asked to list their five previous positions. Since both groups indicated previous experience as the most important educational tool, it is interesting to note prior employment. These positions were from a variety of public and private organizations. The positions listed most often from CVB directors were those in sales and marketing in hotels and airports. Additional positions were tourism managers and developers, public relations officials, consultants, service managers, research director, political party official, mayor, chamber of commerce official, and family business owner. State tourism directors listed positions in advertising, education, attraction managers, hotel management and sales, recreation and environmental planner, reporters, public relations or public information officers, etc. The difference between the two groups is basically more of a management versus a marketing or communications orientation. CVB directors by prior experience have more managerial experience than state tourism directors.

People Are Most Important Resource

Directors were asked to rate the importance of managerial resources: money, people, time, information, energy, facilities, procedures, equipment, and inventory. Figure 4 lists these rankings.
In both groups, people were considered the most important resource. The first four resources were ranked identically in the two studies, though their means and levels of intensity differed. No resource in the state tourism director study was ranked 1 or 2 by all respondents. Some resources for public sector tourism managers are out of their control, e.g., their budgets are often set and they must work within that framework. Their recognition of the importance of these factors, however, can impact management performance.

Management skills and abilities are interpreted differently by different people. Discussions and studies of management skills often differentiate between managers and leaders. For the purposes of this discussion, managers are those individuals who get the job done through people and utilize the resources available to them to get the job done. Conversely, leaders are not necessarily managers. Leaders, as Jennings stated, are people who will take an organization into areas that they would not normally have gone. These are people of vision that can conceptualize and see the organization in the future. Figure 5 illustrates these ratings.

Interestingly, leadership skills and employee relations were rated as the most important skills for CVB directors. These two skill areas are not mutually exclusive, but they are an interesting one and two combination. Leadership is a logical top choice in that it is important for the director of a convention and visitor bureau to be able to visualize a great city or tourism destination area. Employee relations as a skill is critical, since leaders will need people to implement their visions. In the CVB ratings there is a distinct orientation toward communication skills. Additionally, some skills could be grouped as a communication mode, i.e., employee relations, marketing, and public relations. State tourism directors are also more communications oriented in their ratings. This coincides with their previous experience.
and education. Director positions can be characterized by leadership, business and communication skills.

**Technical Skills Are Rated Lower**

Also notable toward the bottom on this list are technical skills, i.e., accounting, research, and training. The technical skills rating is understandably low, as are research and training, because the leader of the organization need not be the technical expert in an area, but must have the skills to use the information and results of the operators and technicians to make management decisions and view the impact of these decisions conceptually for the entire organization. For example, information was rated highly as a management resource. Research, as a skill that could yield this information, is ranked relatively low. This perhaps can be explained in that research generally can be contracted to outside specialists or agencies and the results used by the director to make effective decisions.

Employee relations is ranked fifth by state tourism directors and second by convention and visitor bureau executives. One might speculate that the business orientation, more predominant in the convention and visitor directors in terms of experience and education, has enhanced the awareness of these individuals to employee needs and the shortage of qualified employees in the work force. The ranking of other skills differs, but generally is in the same cluster of skills as they were in the state tourism director survey. Convention
and visitor bureau directors rate leadership skills first and state
tourism directors rate public relations skills first. This reemphasizes
the management versus marketing orientation of the two groups,
though, as Drucker stated, marketing is integral to management in that
the purpose of business is to create customers.6

A review of the results of the survey allows one to characterize a
successful tourism manager in both his or her personal and practical
skills. It should be logical, therefore, to develop a job specification for
the position of convention and visitor director and complement this
specification with a variety of academic course work to produce a
successful tourism manager. Dashler and Ninemeier7 stated that a job
specification indicates the personal qualities needed to successfully
perform tasks which make up the position. Based on director
responses, the following qualifications are necessary:

* **Experience:** The individual should have a minimum of six years
experience with convention and visitor bureaus or similar work. Prior
experience should be business oriented. Preference should be given to
those that have held previous tourism oriented positions: e.g. chamber
of commerce, tourism development, assistant CVB directors, state
tourism offices, regional tourism offices, etc.

* **Education:** The director should have a minimum of a bachelor's
degree, preferably in a business or tourism area, though extensive
prior experience may supplement this requirement for individuals with
non business degrees.

* **Communication skills:** The director should possess excellent
communication skills, oral, written, internal, and external.

* **Human relations skills:** The director should work well with
people. This position requires individuals who can work well with a
variety of tourism publics, e.g., local attractions, accommodations,
retail and food and beverage facilities, the local governments, and
contact people for the markets segments the bureau would like to
attract.

* **Knowledge of the tourism system:** The director should
understand tourism as a force in the community and be able to relate
this concept to the local community. This will require long term
planning and a tourism program for maximum economic benefit and
minimum social and cultural harm.

* **Leadership ability:** The director will need to possess leadership
skills, exhibited through long term planning, mission, and goals.

* **Political savvy:** The director will need to be aware of the
interaction between the public and the private sector and the need to
work with an ever-changing political system.
A job specification can be used in conjunction with responses from the survey to develop a job description, which details the duties and responsibilities of the job. Many of the personal skills and abilities needed for success are perceived to be qualitative. These skills can be balanced with the "language of the tourism business" offered by tourism management education. Many current managers in tourism have fallen into the industry by chance. Many of these individuals have the minimum qualifications, but no orientation toward tourism and perhaps little understanding of the complexity and diversity of the field. It is these individuals who would benefit from formal graduate education or a continuing education program. For example, an individual from the private sector might have extensive business experience in tourism, but might not understand the complexities of working in the public sector and with political officials. In this example, an orientation to tourism public policy and political savvy would be very helpful.

**Education Should Be Interdisciplinary**

Tourism management education should be developed on an interdisciplinary basis. Management issues should be weighed against environmental concerns and cultural and societal impacts. Therefore, course work should include policy, development, marketing, communications, strategy, and tourism business ethics. General business courses in management, finance, and accounting will also enable the manager to have a working knowledge of these functional areas. It is not necessary for directors to be technicians, but they must have the interpretation and analysis skills in technical areas. Additionally, course work in non-business areas such as geography, anthropology, international studies, and mass communications will assist the student to understand the diversity of the tourism field. Subject areas for such study should be communication (persuasion and negotiation, advertising, business writing, oral communication, and inter-personal communication), business (tourism systems, management skills, policy, services management, economics, planning and development, marketing, finance and accounting), social sciences (geography, anthropology, psychology, sociology, and political science). Other critical skills include research methods and management, information systems, transportation, and international studies.

The cumulative result will be a sound tourism educational program that will be able to meet a specific objective. The objective of a tourism management program, therefore, is to produce a graduate who has a theoretical and working knowledge of tourism, technical business skills, and an understanding of the interaction of tourism within a community and the ever increasing internationalization of the tourism industry. The results of this study and other studies to be conducted in the future will enable educators to add to the base of knowledge of the profile of a successful tourism management professional.
The uniformity of tourism programs offered is limited. In developing an appropriate curriculum it is necessary to understand the perceptions of those in the professional arena as well as meet the academic standards of a high quality program. Without effort on the part of the universities and practitioners to bridge the gaps between theory and practice, the advancement of tourism as a profession and an academic area will be hindered. The argument can be made that there is a need for continuing and/or graduate education in tourism if the industry is going to receive the respect and support necessary to grow in the economy.

References


R. M. O’Halloran is an assistant professor in the School of Hotel and Restaurant Management at the University of Denver.