

Career exploration among hospitality workers during the COVID-19 pandemic – insights for future

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the career exploration trends among hospitality employees during the COVID-19 pandemic, gain insights into the labour shortages, and provide implications for the future of the hospitality industry's workforce. The pandemic decimated local, national, and international mobility, decimating the hospitality industry. All the hospitality organizations downsized, furloughed and/or reduced the compensation of their employees to keep up with turbulent times. Post-pandemic, the hospitality industry is ready to rehire the employees that were laid off or furloughed during the pandemic. However, the employees have not returned, and the industry is undergoing chronic labour shortages. Using the tenets of the career exploration theory, we collected data from 198 individuals who were/are employed in the hospitality industry about their career exploration tendencies during the pandemic. The results showed heightened levels of career exploration within and outside the hospitality industry; it is imperative that HRD practitioners should respond to the changing needs of hospitality industry employees. The study contributes to the lifespan approach to career exploration by highlighting self-exploration and environmental exploration by hospitality industry employees during the pandemic irrespective of demographic differences.

Keywords

COVID-19 • Hospitality • Career Exploration • Human Resources

Career exploration is a process characterized by exploratory behaviours and cognitions relating to vocational development (Stumpf et al., 1983). Individuals exhibit exploratory behaviour by actively questioning, experimenting, and weighing various choices before making decisions (Crocetti et al., 2013). When COVID-19 overwhelmed the world in a matter of weeks, employees working in the hospitality industry were especially affected due to restrictive government guidelines that negatively impacted the hospitality industry. During the initial stages of the pandemic, citing public health concerns, governments across the world used emergency powers to restrict an individual's ability to travel, visit other places, and meet other people for professional, recreational, or personal reasons. These restrictions and lockdowns impacted the hospitality industry very badly—restaurants limited to take-outs, capacity reduction for meeting spaces due to social distancing guidelines, and travel restrictions and stay-at-home orders impacting hotel occupancies etc. (Gursoy & Chi, 2020). In addition, the pandemic crisis caused closures of hotels, restaurants, and tourism-related businesses, resulting in layoffs and smaller job market (Park & Jones, 2021; Tu et al., 2021). Deserted tourist hotspots, empty

city centres, museums locked, beaches blocked, flights in storage, and cancelled events became normal during the onslaught of the pandemic. Considering all the negative impacts, the hospitality industry made substantial changes to their operations during the COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 business environment to enhance customers' willingness to patronize their business (Gossling et al., 2020). In line with a study conducted by Gursoy and Chi (2020), reopening of restaurants and hotels did not bring back customers immediately. Dwindling finances, labour shortages, and high operating costs ended many hospitality-oriented businesses in the short term.

In these unprecedented times, hospitality operators and employees are coping with elevated levels of anxiety and uncertainty. In the early days of the pandemic, employment fell by half between February 2020 and April 2020 in leisure and hospitality, which includes restaurants and hotels (Bartik et al., 2020). The COVID-19 related restrictions have led to the highest level of disruptions both locally, nationally, and internationally for the hospitality industry (Bajrami et al., 2021), and the World Travel and Tourism Council estimated anywhere from 98 to almost 200 million travel and tourism

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jobs were lost worldwide (WTTC, 2020). Layoffs and furloughs became common in the hospitality industry during the crisis, and the uncertainty of the future job market is a cause of concern among hospitality workers. A study by Chen (2020) revealed that most hospitality workers felt panicked about the crisis and the lack of support hampered their abilities to cope with the crisis. Another after effect of COVID-19 is that the general workforce is getting anxious regarding their future career (Mahmud et al., 2020). In addition to employment and health risks, essential workers like hospitality employees face psychological strain from conducting their work while distancing from others, wearing protective gear, and constantly sanitizing, all regular reminders of the serious public and personal health threat of human contact (Autin et al., 2020). The pandemic brought changes in the organization of work that reinforced career management skills, such as career adaptability and resilience. Organizations, supervisors, and employees are key agents that can influence employee career development while putting HRD as the central facilitator in that process. Career development from an HRD perspective must address employees, organizational influences, and support mechanisms. Career exploration is an integral part of career development where employees themselves show an adequate level of accountability and responsibility to review their career and to develop their skills and abilities for career advancement. Re-emphasizing career development as a core component of HRD highlights the significance of career development theories in adjusting to pandemics and crises that impact individual career goals and organizational strategic goals and opportunities.

Career exploration focuses on the self and the environment as the sources of career exploration (Stumpf et al., 1983). Career exploration is also characterized by the amount of exploration the individuals are willing to undertake (Stumpf et al., 1983). Flum and Blustein (2000) contended that the career exploration process encompasses the exploration and evaluation of a broad set of internal attributes and external opportunities and constraints in relation to various career-relevant contexts. Traditionally, career exploration was perceived to happen during adolescence or early adulthood when individuals venture into making decisions about their future career choices (Jiang et al., 2019). However, individuals continue exploring their careers throughout their lifespan beyond adolescence. Research suggests that people explore their careers over their lifespan for a variety of reasons—for career development, due to unemployment, risk of losing employment, undesirable employment, work environment, a life event etc. (Koen et al., 2010; Lent & Brown, 2013; Taveira & Moreno, 2003;). As Flum and Blustien (2000) stated, the boundary-less nature of careers requires people to continuously engage in career exploration across their lifespan.

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2020) report published in November 2020 reported the number of travel and tourism related jobs lost worldwide in 2020 to be 142.6 million (19.8 million in United States) and projected that the losses will go up to 174.4 million jobs worldwide (24.7 million in United States) by early 2021. Given the state of affairs in the hospitality industry including the severe labour shortages felt across the globe, this study is focused on hospitality employees with the following objectives: First, to understand the scope of employment disruptions in the hospitality industry during COVID-19; second, to explore the career exploration trends among hospitality employees and whether the trends are influenced by any demographic factors, and third, to explore what the career exploration trends mean to workforce availability in the hospitality industry in the future. Additionally, the post-pandemic world is re-defining work and as HRD researchers, we must place an urgent emphasis on the career exploration of older individuals, such as adult and aged workers, who tend to engage in self-and environmental exploration for professional development. or enhancement, or due to life events.

Review of relevant literature

Investigating and exploring the career exploration trends among hospitality workers during the COVID-19 pandemic merits understanding of the hospitality industry and the concept of career exploration. It is important to understand the context of the study, and literature reviews seek to describe, summarize, evaluate, clarify, and/or integrate the content in the existing scholarship in a particular field (Kurian & Nafukho, 2021). In this section, we briefly review the impacts of previous crises on the hospitality industry and then focus on the COVID-19 pandemic. Hospitality is the largest sector within the travel and tourism economy and is also a vital ingredient of the tourism experience (Davidson et al., 2010). It is important to consider that the industry is always vulnerable during crises (Wang & Ritchie, 2012). Scholars have identified that the effect of a crisis on the hospitality industry varies and it can affect both supply and demand (Kubickova et al., 2019). In addition, the level of impact will depend on numerous factors including the geographical scope of the crisis (global or local), economic and political condition in the country, as well the tourist's country of origin (Kubickova et al., 2019; Perles-Ribes et al., 2016). In general, during a crisis, companies tightened their budgets and business travel decreased dramatically. Most organizations restricted their non-essential travel, conferences, and corporate events (Smeral, 2010). This decline in business travel causes financial challenges for hotels, airlines, and other hospitality service providers.

The 2008 economic downturn and the terrorist attacks of 9/11 also reduced the number of tourists in general (Kubickova *et al.*, 2019). The 2008 crisis specifically made tourists more price sensitive (Naidoo *et al.*, 2010), while the 9/11 attack made Americans afraid of flying by airplane (Seaney, 2011). Tourists were more likely to take shorter trips and substitute their international travels for domestic ones (Rittichainuwat *et al.*, 2014). Shifts in consumer behaviours will always influence hotel companies to revisit their strategies (Smeral, 2010). Hotels may have to offer lower prices or other incentives to certain groups of individuals or companies to save their business.

Hospitality industry and COVID-19

The hospitality industry includes a broad category of fields within the service industry such as lodging, food and drink service, event planning, theme parks, transportation, cruise line, travelling, and other additional fields within the tourism industry (BLS, 2019). The hospitality industry has increased its role in many countries on account of its direct contribution to gross domestic product (GDP), job creation and employment, and has important spillover effects in contributing to economic and social progress consequently strengthening national economies (Cut-Lupulescu *et al.*, 2014). The American Hotel & Lodging Association (2020) stated that the hotel industry was the first to be negatively impacted by the pandemic and will be the last one to recover.

According to Jones and Comfort (2020), millions of people employed in the hospitality sector who have already lost their jobs during the pandemic, have been thrown into the poverty abyss while others were experiencing extremely elevated levels of job insecurity and physical and psychological risks associated with it. COVID-19-induced layoffs have become a serious socio-economic problem that influences employee well-being (both laid off and surviving) putting organization survival in flux (Tu *et al.*, 2021). Most positions in the hospitality industry have a high degree of personal contact with customers/guests and thus customer-facing hospitality employees are at a higher risk of being infected by others. Employees in the hospitality industry are highly susceptible to health-related crises due to various factors-high volume of patrons, large staff work teams, exposure to intra- and international travellers, the potential for contagion through cross-contamination, and multiple pathogen delivery mechanisms (e.g., surfaces, cutlery and crockery, food) (Hu *et al.*, 2021). This further contributes to employees' job insecurity and turnover intentions (Bajrami *et al.*, 2021). As a result, due to fear of an imminent infection by working in the hospitality industry, employees were choosing to remain unemployed and explore careers in other industries further

contributing to labour shortages in the hospitality industry (Tu *et al.*, 2021). Thus, it is critical to understand this vicious cycle of employment in the hospitality industry to support its sustenance.

Career exploration

Involuntary job loss or experiencing a colleague's job loss is one of the most difficult situations that an employee will encounter in their career. Most unemployment literature focuses on the negative effects and profound difficulties that job loss creates for the affected individuals and surviving individuals; another aspect of a job loss experience (either as impacted or a survivor) is the impact of the individuals' career and outlook. Jones (1989) found that some individuals, while viewing job loss as a negative life event, also appreciated it as an opportunity to change their direction in life and to improve their career prospects. This is especially true in the current context of the pandemic.

As an individual adapts to job loss, the adaptation phase is characterized by reflection, the exploration of various career options, and by career planning (Zikic & Klehe, 2006). Traditionally, career exploration was most associated with the school-to-work transition as a critical stage in an individual's career development (Super, 1957). It refers to "purposive behaviour and cognitions that afford access to information about occupations, jobs, and organizations that was not previously in the stimulus field" (Stumpf, *et al.*, 1983, p. 192). Stumpf and colleagues noted that the career exploration process involves four aspects: (1) where one explores, (2) how one explores, (3) how much one explores, and (4) what one explores (i.e., the focus of exploration). As research progressed, career exploration was seen as the gathering of information relevant to the progress of one's career, which is a lifelong process that is triggered particularly during transitions in life (Blustein, 1997; Stumpf *et al.*, 1983; Zikic & Hall, 2009). Career exploration involves gathering career-related information and testing hypotheses about the self and the environment to reach career goals (Hall, 1986). Hall (1986) also found that irrespective of how one has settled into a routine or the outcomes of such career exploration, routines will change or be disrupted, either voluntarily or involuntarily, and this will often cause one to engage in another cycle of career exploration. According to Stumpf and colleagues (1983), an individual will typically look for information about his or her own vocational interests and skills (i.e., career self-exploration) or the activities one can expect to be doing in a specific job (i.e., career environment exploration) before making any career decision. Environmental exploration is an individuals' investigation of various career options by proactively collecting information on jobs, organizations,

occupations, or industries that allow more informed career decisions (Hall, 1986). Self-exploration focuses on exploring one's own interests, values, and experiences to reflect on one's career and to gain a deeper understanding of oneself (Zikic & Hall, 2009).

With increasing career options, career exploration is becoming more challenging. Individuals are also becoming more cognizant of impending changes in job responsibilities due to societal expectations, the rapidly changing nature of employment, and technological advancements changing the nature of certain jobs and industries (Storme & Celik, 2018). Given the increasing prevalence of job insecurity across the globe coupled with COVID-19 induced employment changes, career exploration during periods of rapid change needs to be aggressively studied. Job loss, impending job loss, or job insecurity can motivate an employee to prepare and plan for re-entry into the job market. Scholars have argued that initial exploration activities happen during early adulthood to reach a career decision point and subsequently to reach a fit, find a niche and establish career routines (Zikic & Hall, 2009). However, these routines may change or be interrupted voluntarily or involuntarily at various stages of life, irrespective of the extent to which individuals settle into such a career routine, and as a result, may lead to another cycle of exploration (Hall, 1986; Zikic & Hall, 2009). Research suggests that unemployed adults, those at risk of losing employment or those in undesirable employment, prioritize re-employment as the key focus of career exploration (Koen et al., 2010). According to Klehe and colleagues (2011), during periods of organizational downsizing or dramatic disruptions, career exploration tends to foster negative outcomes (e.g., reduced loyalty and increased turnover intentions) that increase employees' actual voluntary turnover. A review of career exploration studies (Jiang et al., 2019) found that adolescents or early adults in the pre-employment stage explore the self and the environment to develop career interests and seek job opportunities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced employees to consider the reality of its impact on career goals. Employees have been forced to reconsider or readjust their career goals as being achievable, deferred, or even eliminated. Additionally, the emerging forms of employment relationship—flexible, temporary, and non-standard character—has increased the complexity of HRD, especially career development during this extraordinary crisis. Considering the lifespan perspective of career exploration and the severe employment disruptions in the hospitality industry due to COVID-19, this study will have the potential to contribute to the field of career exploration in adulthood and how negative events affect the career decisions of an individual.

Method

Utilizing convenience sampling, the study employed a quantitative, non-experimental research perspective. The study used a cross-sectional survey, and responses were analysed with a descriptive correlational design, which describes the relationship or association between two or more variables (Drummond & Murphy-Reyes, 2018). Grove and colleagues (2013) stated that descriptive designs "may be used to develop theory, identify problems with current practice, *justify current practice, make judgments, or determine what others in similar situations are doing*" (p. 215). Thus, the purpose of this non-experimental quantitative correlational study was to determine the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and career exploration among hospitality workers, whether the demographic background plays a role in career exploration and make inferences for the future. Quantitative research predominantly assumes a positivist worldview and emphasizes the importance of generalizability and reliability (Henn et al., 2006).

The target population for this study comprised current and past employees of the hospitality industry in the United States. Participants for the study were recruited using social media and personal networks in the hospitality industry. Snowball sampling (Berg, 2006) was also utilized, where qualified participants were requested to share the survey with other subjects like them who meet the criteria defined for the targeted population. The data collection method was structured and consistent, using a web-based questionnaire with close-ended statements. The self-report survey included five measures: (1) Whether the employee was impacted by COVID-19, (2) environment exploration, (3) self-exploration (4) frequency of exploration, and (5) number of occupations considered. The career exploration survey was adapted from the career exploration survey developed by Stumpf et al. (1983); and the survey measured the major components of career exploration: (1) where one explores, (2) how one explores (Self), (3) how much one explores, and (4) what one explores. Environmental exploration was measured using 6 items, self-exploration was measured using 5 items. The response was collected using a Likert-scale, for both environment and self-exploration, which ranged from 1-5 (1 - little, 2 - somewhat, 3 - a moderate amount, 4 - a substantial amount, and 5 - a great deal). The frequency of exploration and the number of occupations considered did not have preset limits. The career exploration survey has consistently reported Cronbach's alpha above the acceptable threshold of internal consistency ($\alpha = .70$) which reconfirms its reliability. The best way to evaluate and validate an instrument for face value is to analyse similar studies using that instrument (Creswell, 2009), and the survey instrument

is validated in multiple studies. Additionally, the following demographic variables were collected: (a) age, (b) gender, (c) ethnicity, (d) educational level, (d) current employment status, and (e) current or last job type.

Data collection

198 individuals who are/were employed in the hospitality industry responded to the survey while 98 of them were partial responses. 55 % of the respondents were male and 37.5% identified as female, and 2.6% of the respondents chose other gender or prefer not to say. Almost 74% (73.8%) of the respondents were millennials while 17.5% identified a Gen X and 3.8% were baby boomers. 28.7% identified as white, 11.3% identified as black, 20% identified as Hispanic, and 31.3% identified as Asian. 52.6% of the respondents have a bachelor's degree or higher, 43.8% worked in an operational or technical job while 38.30% worked in a supervisory or managerial role. 62.5% of the respondents stated that their employment in the hospitality industry was negatively impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic while 18.8% stated that there was no impact, and 18.8% were unsure about the impact on the hospitality industry.

Results

In social sciences, when the coefficient value has an absolute number greater than 0.49, it is considered a strong correlation, and if it is between ± 0.28 and ± 0.49 , then a medium correlation, and correlational coefficients between -0.28 and + 0.28 are

weak (Cohen, 1988). In this study, we interpret the values by using ratings from Cohen (1988). As evident from the correlation matrix shown in Table 1, the relationship between COVID-19's impact and career self-exploration showed positive correlation at 0.27, with a confidence interval of 95% and a statistical significance of $p \leq 0.05$. The relationship between COVID-19's impact and career environment exploration were minimal and did not show any statistical significance. Self-exploration showed positive correlation with environment exploration (.56, $p \leq 0.01$), frequency of exploration (.37, $p \leq 0.01$), and the number of occupational areas investigated (.47, $p \leq 0.01$). Similarly, the frequency of exploration showed moderate relations with environment exploration (.51, $p \leq 0.01$) and the number of occupational areas investigated (.45, $p \leq 0.01$).

The data suggests that employment issues resulting from COVID-19 motivated hospitality workers to perform career self-exploration that led to a career environment exploration. Hospitality employees' career self-exploration and career environment exploration have a significant impact on the frequency of exploration and the number of occupational areas researched. This study investigated demographic data to predict workers' feelings towards the impact of COVID-19 on their careers by asking if their employment in the hospitality industry was negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. A one-way ANOVA was performed to compare the severity of the impact of COVID-19 on individuals from different demographic backgrounds. The results revealed that the comparative demographic data was not statistically significant (p -value > 0.05), which leads to the assumption that decisions were overly broad without any underlying strategy. The results of this study further confirmed the unprecedented challenges that the hospitality industry confronted during the pandemic.

Table 1. Correlation Matrix

		Correlations				
		COVID-19 Impact	Environment Exploration	Self Exploration	Frequency of Exploration	Occupational Areas Investigated
COVID-19 Impact	Pearson Correlation	1	0.089	.268*	0.06	0.009
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0.443	0.018	0.606	0.935
Environment Exploration	Pearson Correlation	0.089	1	.558**	.505**	.438**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.443	0	<.001	<.001	<.001
Self Exploration	Pearson Correlation	.268*	.558**	1	.371**	.472**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.018	<.001	0	<.001	<.001
Frequency of Exploration	Pearson Correlation	0.06	.505**	.371**	1	.448**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.606	<.001	<.001	0	<.001
Occupational Areas Investigated	Pearson Correlation	0.009	.438**	.472**	.448**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.935	<.001	<.001	<.001	0

*.Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**.Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

Extant research informs us that the job losses during the pandemic could have been voluntary, involuntary, short-term, or permanent. Our study confirms that most hospitality employees were negatively impacted by COVID-19, which forced them to explore careers in other industries. Our study informs the hospitality literature that the demographic factors of the employees have no effect on COVID-19 related employment decisions. It is safe to infer that the hospitality industry's response to the pandemic was widespread without taking into consideration employees' age, gender, ethnicity, education, or job type. We thus assert that the hospitality industry does not have strategic plans to manage major disruptions to their businesses other than reducing the workforce.

During the pandemic, hospitality establishments ran their operations with a minimum staff level to maintain lower operating costs, however those fortunate enough to keep their jobs during the pandemic had to work in a more demanding environment and sometimes perform work out of their area of expertise. Due to the high contact nature of hospitality jobs, customer attitude towards hospitality employees also saw a major shift, sometimes turning hostile. Employees have had to take extra precautions during their interactions with guests and coworkers, while employers have had to set higher expectations for employees as they implement government mandates, such as introducing new operational procedures for enhanced hygiene standards (Kwok, 2022). To top it all, hospitality employees witnessed the flexible work options that many other industries provided for their employees.

From a career exploration standpoint, disruptive career events (layoffs, voluntary separation, overwork, and so on) led the hospitality employees to a career self-exploration which resulted in environmental exploration. As a result of self and environmental exploration, hospitality employees started to search for multiple career fields and increased the frequency of exploration. The employee shortages faced by industries globally can be attributed to the career exploration efforts made by impacted hospitality employees. The substantial shortage of employees in hospitality is likely to challenge the industry post-pandemic indefinitely (Morosan & Bowen, 2022), and that scenario may be attributed to the career environment exploration of impacted employees which may be outside career pathways within the hospitality career cluster. However, Baum et al. (2020) maintained that the pandemic functioned as an amplifier of existing problems rather than the leading cause of the labour shortage in hospitality and tourism. It may well be that the pandemic became the tipping point for hospitality workers who have for years complained about the low wages, working conditions, and work-life balance issues to start reevaluating their career and personal priorities. Either

way, the labour shortage is now a crisis as hospitality industry businesses are nearing pre-pandemic levels, and labour shortage is impacting service quality.

Theoretical and practical implications

The study focused on the hospitality industry and the impact of COVID-19 on career exploration among hospitality industry employees during the COVID-19 era. Extant research has found various psychological and behavioural consequences for those not only negatively impacted by COVID-19 related employment issues but also for those who survived. The job performance of the survivors in the context of survivor guilt and changing work conditions should be further studied from a career development perspective. Career development theory has not incorporated stressful events during the pandemic into career life cycle studies. The impact of such events on society and humanity as a whole; how such events shape the career trajectory of individuals needs to be researched. Life events can shape the career exploration of those directly impacted (laid off, furloughed and so on) as well as those who were not directly impacted (with no change in employment status), which needs to be investigated. The study did not look at career exploration from a critical perspective, nor the decisions made during COVID-19 from a fairness perspective. Future research should direct some effort to look at hospitality industry decision-making (procedural justice) and the outcomes of such decision-making (distributive justice).

It is known that layoffs or similar events not only impact the employee, but their families too. The career events and the pandemic coinciding may impact the employee's family and social circle differently and need to be further investigated. The lack of social support during the pandemic may have led to negative social outcomes including but not limited to mental health, physical well-being etc. The impact of such outcomes and how they mould the career choices for the future should be thoroughly considered in future career development research. Even though downsizing is an urgent action in COVID-19, it has unintended consequences on employees' job insecurity, turnover, stress, performance, and more broadly the consideration of hospitality industry as a career choice. By thoroughly examining the ramifications of these outcomes and their influence on career decisions, researchers can gain insights into how hospitality workers navigate career-related challenges during and after the pandemic. Understanding these dynamics can inform the development of support systems, policies, and interventions to assist individuals and their families in managing career transitions and promoting well-being in times of crisis.

The results of this study indicate employees explored career options outside the hospitality industry because of

the various setbacks to their careers during the pandemic. The hospitality industry needs to rapidly combat employee shortages caused by employees' depleting trust in the industry's employment practices during the pandemic. Most employees have a fear of abandonment as the hospitality industry continues to evolve in the post-pandemic world. The industry needs to rebrand some of its job roles by offering better wages and working conditions (Innerhofer et al., 2022). Existing employees should also receive upskilling opportunities so they can operate in the evolving hospitality industry post-pandemic. For instance, digital technologies are being widely applied throughout the industry to reduce manual operations (Carlisle et al., 2021). If employees receive opportunities to gain experience with these digital technologies, organizations show their commitment to facilitating the employees' realistic career planning (Goh & Okumus, 2020). One of the aftermaths of the pandemic is the expansion of gig economy (temporary or contract workers) and as such HRD professionals should make the case for investment in the training and development of atypical workers. Early exposure to the industry practices will help cushion any career shocks and develop career resilience among employees in the hospitality industry.

Last, our findings have critical implications for preparing employees for a career in the hospitality industry. Often, students in public hospitality institutions have unrealistic expectations of their careers in the industry (Tan et al., 2016) and often lack essential skills contributing to the labour shortage (Lacher & Oh, 2012). Educational institutions must engage their students in apprenticeship, mentorship, and exposure to industry practitioners to develop a holistic view of the hospitality industry.

Limitations

The study was conducted during the later stages of the pandemic which should be considered a major limitation of the study. The hospitality workforce who participated in the study are from the USA and the social support systems in other countries may be different. As a result, this study does not reveal how the pandemic induced career events and if they may have a lasting impact, and the eventual losses for the hospitality industry. Utilizing convenience sampling caused several limitations for our study that could be seen in our data. For instance, convenience sampling often leads to a sample that does not accurately represent the target population. In this study, 31% of our participants were Asian which does not reflect the diversity and characteristics of the US population, this issue can highlight the sampling bias. Based on this limitation, the findings from our study may not be generalizable to the broader population.

Concluding thoughts

The hospitality sector, known for its dynamic and diverse career opportunities, was severely impacted by the COVID-19 crisis's consequences (e.g., travel restrictions and social distancing). As a result, many hospitality workers found themselves unemployed or furloughed, limiting their ability to explore new career paths within the industry. The uncertainty surrounding the duration and severity of the pandemic further hindered career planning and advancement. For the hospitality industry, the findings of this study suggest that the stressors induced by the pandemic have elevated the career change intention for those in the hospitality workforce because of the grim job market. Finally, the hospitality industry should think about how it utilized the government handouts which were supposed to protect the millions who were eventually laid off. From a governmental perspective, an examination is needed to estimate the futility of the means they used to support their citizens, and such examination should result in the creation of a new model to support the citizenry during pandemic level events.

HRD professionals should be able to play a strategic role at the level of the organization and society by contributing to the development of individuals, workplaces, and societies and help them in collaboration with governmental institutions to be ready to face any future disruptive crisis. These extraordinary times and changing employment relationship call for the implementation of non-employment HRD (Harvey, 2011), calling for the contribution of HRD in the development of the community and the creation of empowered spaces by involving individuals who are not in a standard employment relationship. The future of HRD lies in broadening the role of HRD professionals beyond the organization's boundaries by forming partnerships among organizations, governmental institutions, professional, and vocational associations; and positioning them as strategic partners in society.

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