**How Can Hospitality Industry Leaders Advance Disability Inclusion? Research Response to Hospitality Disability Inclusion**

As a hospitality management student pursuing a career in the hospitality industry, my goal is to obtain an understanding of both the advantages and disadvantages of the industry. One topic of discussion that grabbed my attention is the hospitality company’s efforts with disability awareness, inclusion, and accessibility. As the industry continues to flourish, hospitality leaders search for practices, benefits, and challenges related to the start of disability inclusion in the hospitality workforce. As shown across numerous research, integrating people with disabilities into the workforce enhances the performance of companies and their success.

**Journal Article: Disability Inclusion Initiatives in the Hospitality Industry: An Exploratory Study of Industry Leaders**

In the academic journal article I selected, professors and doctors of hospitality and tourism management collaborated with vast and diversified research on issues impacting human resources in the hospitality and tourism industry. This article was published in the Journal of *Human Resources in Hospitality and Tourism*.

Kalargyrou and Volis et. al (2014) began by introducing the statistics and research from the World Health Organization (2013) which states that 15% of the global population has a documented disability. Despite changes in legislation, policy, and attitudes to improving access of people with disabilities into the workforce, the biggest minority group is still overlooked and disregarded when obtaining meaningful employment. Another study has noted that in the approaching years in the United States, aging current workers and a decrease in new employees will result in a labor shortage Lengnick-Hall et al. (2008). Overlapping evidence is shown from a study by Chi and Qu, (2003) claiming that researchers have pointed out that hospitality leaders should begin integrating people with disabilities into the workforce as a strategy to fill these crucial gaps in labor. The authors conclude that the in-depth introduction of this study is that it is going to focus on four main points. The objective is to detect which hospitality leaders participate in disability inclusion, what practices these leaders are implementing to integrate people with disabilities into the hospitality workforce, and the advantages and disadvantages of proactively integrating people with disabilities into the hospitality workforce.

The second research section from Kalargrou and Volis et. al (2014) describes an established definition of disability that is applicable and recognizable to all audiences. They obtain this information from the World Health Organization (2013b), which sets standards on health topics like disabilities within the United Nations system. The WHO (2013b) defines disability as an umbrella term that covers impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. Now that the authors have research supporting what defines disability, they continue this section by discussing the benefits and concerns of proactively hiring employees with disabilities. For the benefits, the authors pull a study from Hernandez and McDonald ( 2010 ). This study surveyed Hospitality employers and revealed that workers with disabilities obtained nearly identical average job ratings on performance compared to workers without disabilities. Another benefit comes from a study in which Gröschl (2003) revealed that hotel guests preferred an integrated hotel because of a barrier-free and non-judgmental environment with accommodating facilities.

The authors introduced research that consists of employer concerns related to hiring employees with disabilities in hospitality. A case study from Gröschl (2007) on 42 hotels identified that people with disabilities result in accommodation costs, and fear of limited communication and interaction between employees with or without disabilities due to lack of education. The authors then overlap their research with hospitality literature from Donnelly and Joseph (2012), which explores concerns about employers' uncertainty about disciplining, managing, and evaluating employees with disabilities. Specifically in this part of the article, Kalargyrou and Volis do a great job overlaying Evidence to ensure there are no gaps between the studies.

The third section of Kalargyrou and Volis et. al (2014) compiled research presents their study and Analysis of eight different Hospitality employers who are proactively hiring and integrating people with disabilities into their workforce. The researchers carefully created this list using information from the United States Business Leadership Network which collaborates with hospitality employers who demonstrate disability inclusion initiatives.

The last section of Kalargyrou and Volis et. al's (2014) article consists of the results and a list of hospitality companies and leaders who have a strong initiative to integrate people with disabilities into their workforce. The first company that the authors introduced in the section of the article is Starwood Hotels and Resorts. According to Starwood Hotels and Resorts, “Creating an environment of inclusion for our associates, guests, and suppliers isn't just the right thing to do, it is the very core of our business”(Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide, Inc., 2012b). From Starwood's policies and initiatives, the authors conclude that the company argues that a diverse environment is at the core of its success and helps enter untapped markets, increase speed to markets, and portray its loyalty to diverse communities. Another company that the authors mentioned in their research article results is Marriott International, Inc. They explained that Marriott International is a lodging company that is dedicated to creating an inclusive workforce environment and claims that hiring people with disabilities is good for workforce diversity (Marriott International, Inc., 2012). This research is supported by Marriott Senior Diversity Executive, David Rodriguez. He states, “We strive to create an inclusive environment where the talent and unique ideas of 300,000 Associates at our managed and franchised properties worldwide can flourish” (Marriott International, Inc., 2012, p.1). They conclude their argument with information from an interview with Richard Marriott. The authors take his reference of him discussing Marriott International as he is involved with proactively recruiting and hiring people with disabilities because they make the company's work stronger, more valuable, and more productive (Williams, J.M., 1999). In conclusion, the study's findings do confirm and extend the literature surrounding the benefits of disability inclusion in the hospitality field and set a foundation for future research in this sector.

**Ted Talk: Creating Inclusive Workplaces for All**

Disability public speaker and DEI consultant, Catrina Rivera, Had the opportunity to speak on the Ted Talk stage explaining to her audience why employers have a lot of disabled employees they don't know about. She asks the audience to be in the perspective of what a job interview is like for a disabled person. She reveals the struggles and challenges they have to face before finally sitting in their seat with a side relief, finally being done with the obstacles a non-disabled person might not even notice. She continues her talk saying that because the Americans with Disability Act was passed in 1990, she and other disabled people are protected from discrimination due to disability in the workplace. Even though she's protected, she's still scared as she says, “ If the employer knew about my blindness, they might have thought: she'll be an expensive employee. She can't do the fieldwork required for this role” (TEDxTalk, 2022 4:22). She reports that according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021), disabled people were about two times more likely to be unemployed than non-disabled people. She then discussed the best practices for inclusion that are free and simple. One example that she mentions is closed captions and how people with ADHD, auditory processing disorders, in English language Learners can benefit from having information presented in more than one way. Another example she stated is sending out meeting agendas in advance can help the deaf and hard of hearing follow The conversation more easily. She ends her TED Talk by stating, “Knowing why someone needs a certain kind of support is not as important as actually providing that support”(TEDxTalk, 2022 10:12).

**Interview with Hailey Bouer**

University of Mississippi senior Hailey Bouer, a hospitality management major, is the first to know what inclusion is like in the hospitality industry. Bouer expressed that because of her work experience in hotel management and her upper-level courses at the University of Mississippi (NHM 370 and NHM 491), she has been educated and brought awareness to this overlooked problem. After carrying out research and exploration in disability inclusion, Bouer stated:

“As a hospitality student who has learned and gained experience in the hotel industry, It is apparent that these hospitality leaders are taking initiative and working aimlessly on disability inclusion. They are finally investing in training programs and accessible facilities to accommodate both guests and employees with disabilities. The hospitality industry is gradually shaping a more accessible and inclusive future for all.”

In addition to her response, She pointed out that social media has been a huge factor in bringing awareness to disability inclusion in the industry and has brought all kinds of communities together who communicate and discuss ways they can actively help people with disabilities feel more comfortable and welcomed.

**Response**

As a student in hospitality who is passionate about making a difference, conducting research through articles, interviewing colleagues, and analyzing Ted Talks have truly opened my eyes to how there needs to be more initiative with disability inclusion. The more aware and accepting we are as a society, the easier it will be for major corporate companies to hop on board with this positive change in the hospitality industry.

**References**

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