Hospitality Insights

Vision: To communicate hospitality research to practitioners in the hospitality industry in order to inform their thinking, processes and practices.

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Hospitality Insights contains concise and accessible summaries of AUT's hospitality research. Our publication is aimed at a practitioner/industry audience, with a focus on relevant issues to help build a more sustainable hospitality industry for the future.

This journal operates as a tangible vehicle for meaningful outreach with local and international hospitality communities. Our objective is to stimulate dialogue between academic researchers and industry practitioners, as well as with other interested members of the hospitality community. We believe such a discourse can improve business practice, sustainability and workers' wellbeing, and lead to the creation of more healthy societies, whilst also engendering impact and uptake of academic research.

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Editorial

Shelagh Mooney and Tracy Harkison

Kia ora koutou

Kia ora and welcome to the latest issue of *Hospitality Insights.* The journal provides open access to short, peer reviewed summaries of research and think pieces, for the hospitality industry and community. This current issue presents four diverse articles. The first is an opinion piece on *in*hospitality, explaining how this can occur when an overload in hospitable practices reaches a tipping point and becomes, 'hospitality fatigue'. The second article looks at the potential of older workers, a frequently overlooked sector of the workforce, and suggests that the hospitality industry consider the benefits they may offer to the industry as a whole. The third ponders the similarities between tourism and zombiism, asking whether insights from this specific genre might provide fresh ideas for dealing with the resurgent problems of over-tourism. Finally, the fourth article offers insights into workplace toxicity, and why, after the stresses and disruptions of the past few years, it warrants closer attention from hospitality professionals.

We hope that heading into the holiday season, you will enjoy a renewing and relaxing break with your whānau. We look forward to sharing more fascinating research with you in 2024.

Ngā mihi nui

Opinion Piece: The importance of *in*hospitality

Dr Paul Lynch

Paul Lynch is Honorary Adjunct Professor at Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand. His research focuses upon critical and sociological perspectives on hospitality and the interactions between host and guest, host and home, the nature of hospitality and how the study of hospitality sheds light on people, work, and society.

Periodically, it is helpful to consider how an academic subject might be advanced. I give my suggestion below.

In order to better understand what is hospitality, we need a much deeper understanding of what is *in*hospitality? In the late 1990s in the United Kingdom, hospitality researchers came together to discuss and debate 'hospitality… [as] worthy of serious academic study and [which] could potentially inform both industrial practice and academic endeavour [1]. The discussion had important implications for the advancement of knowledge in the hospitality subject, whether for hospitality management, or simply the study of hospitality and its positioning within the academic sphere, as well as for recognition of the quality of hospitality higher education programmes. The debates were very influential in the development of the study of hospitality. Today, a similar discussion and debate is required regarding 'what is inhospitality', in order to inform not only the hospitality subject and industrial practice, but also to contribute to social advancement.

We live in a world of inhospitality as well as hospitality. One only has to watch a news programme to see examples of the inhospitality that are part and parcel of the fabric of our lives, whether in the form of conflicts, the forced movement of people, certain political discourses and ideologies, or criminal acts. Such inhospitality exists as part of our engagement with the world. However, inhospitality is not confined to newsworthy examples. It is found in our daily lives: the inconsiderate driver; the dehumanising effects of faceless bureaucracy; gaslighting organisational narratives, such as those found on automated telephone answering systems, which are always in a state of being 'exceptionally busy' (rather than ever being under-staffed or intended to pressure the caller to use alternative methods of contact), and which keep you waiting, and waiting; micro-aggressions, bullying, exclusion… Insert your own examples here.

Whilst we may practise hospitality as a way of negotiating the world, we also practise inhospitality for a similar purpose. After

all, there are limits to how much hospitality we can offer, and often for good reason: to avoid 'hospitality fatigue', to protect our mental health, owing to limited resources, as a reaction to inhospitable behaviours or dehumanising systems. Our understanding of inhospitality as a practice, is however, limited, and it is time this omission is addressed. A focus on inhospitable organisational behaviours and systems should be one area of attention. How does inhospitality manifest itself? What are its causes? How does it affect the performance of the organisation? Are there any beneficial aspects to inhospitality, and for whom? What consequences follow on from inhospitality? What are the ethics of inhospitality? We should also focus upon the tipping point of hospitality when it slides into inhospitality, and vice versa.

What would be the value of understanding more about inhospitality for a practitioner audience? We do not know until we have studied it in depth, but if it helps to produce stronger graduates, better organisations, more customer-friendly products, a reduction in staff turnover, more effective managers, increased profitability, enhanced community benefits, to name a few potential outcomes, it will have been worthwhile.

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Are older workers a saviour for the UK hospitality industry given recruitment problems post Brexit?

Andrew Jenkins

Dr Andrew Jenkins is a Senior Lecturer at Huddersfield Business School (HBS), UK. He has written extensively on employment issues in Hospitality and Tourism and is the co-author of "Introducing Human Resource Management" (8th edition), published by Pearson. Andrew is particularly interested in the employment of older workers and his doctorate (from the University of Strathclyde) focused on age discrimination in hotel employment.

Problems relating to recruitment in the hospitality industry, in the UK, and globally, are well known. A report from the UK's Office for National Statistics (2021) [1] states that, 'Hospitality businesses are more than twice as likely as other industries to be experiencing challenges in filling vacancies'. The report further commented that the number of job vacancies in hospitality was at a record high, with three in ten hospitality businesses experiencing recruitment difficulties. Due to the 'perfect storm' of Covid-19, demographic changes and Brexit, the problem of hospitality industry recruitment in the UK has been made significantly worse. It is estimated that the pandemic resulted in the loss of £115 billion in sales, [2] and during this time, many hospitality workers were furloughed and found employment elsewhere. Many have not returned. Demographic changes, resulting in an ageing population, mean that the traditional source of labour for hospitality businesses, those aged 18-24 years [3], represent a shrinking part of the population, and the true costs of Brexit are yet to materialise. According to the Financial Times (2022) [4], hospitality businesses in the UK have lost 2 million workers since the end of 2019 and it is likely that many of these people were EU nationals returning to their home country.

Post Brexit, hospitality businesses in the UK are, for the most part, unable to tap into the large pool of EU workers who might have come to the UK to work, and the introduction of a points-based immigration system in the UK [5] means that most hospitality industry jobs are ineligible for sponsorship. This has been exacerbated by recent changes to UK visa rules that require a general salary threshold of £38,700 for long-term work visas [6]**.** Given the 'war for talent' faced by UK hospitality businesses, where can the industry look for talented workers? One obvious source is 'older workers', often defined as workers aged 50 and above6. Despite the negative stereotypes of older workers being resistant to change, having poor IT skills and requiring time off work due to illness, older workers have many favourable qualities,

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such as having greater work and life experience, a positive work ethic, good customer service skills, and greater loyalty to the firm [7]. These qualities have been recognised by firms outside the hospitality industry. B&Q, the home improvement and garden centre retailer, once staffed two stores wholly with staff aged over fifty [8] and found that it worked so well that the company decided to recruit older workers to all its stores [9].

There are estimated to be 2.5 million people aged over 50 in the UK who would like to work in hospitality and have the requisite skills to be successful [10], but many hospitality businesses are failing to recognise their potential. To address this problem, hospitality organisations should develop targeted recruitment campaigns focusing on older people, have flexible working arrangements, improve the perception of the industry as a 'good' place to work, and address any negative stereotypes relating to older workers. As much of the age discrimination in employment is subtle, an application of 'implicit bias theory' could help identify the ways that subtle and unconscious bias results in the unfair treatment of older workers. Implicit biases are discriminatory biases based on implicit attitudes or implicit stereotypes [11]. In an employment context, this could lead to the exclusion of older workers. Hospitality businesses around the world could benefit from employing more older workers. For example, the Australian Government's Trade and Investment Commission advocates that hospitality businesses might look for skills amongst the 'older demographic' [12]. Whilst not being a panacea, a focus on the recruitment and retention of older workers could go some way towards being a saviour for the hospitality industry.

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Tourism and Zombiism: An evil mirror?

Mairead McEntee and Una McMahon-Beattie

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Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie [1], amongst others, identified 'overtourism' as being the key issue for the tourism industry. The impacts of Covid-19 created an opportunity for the tourism industry to consider its trajectory, and to tackle issues, including overtourism, under the auspices of the great reset [2].

The great tourism reset did not last, with destinations failing to 'build back better'[3]. Statistics indicate that tourism rapidly recovered from Covid-19 with the UNWTO projecting international tourist arrivals to rise to 80 to 95% of pre-pandemic levels by 2023, if not exceeding pre-pandemic arrival numbers [4].

In their book chapter, *Destination of the Dead*, [5] suggested that overtourism presented the same challenges and impacts as that of a plague of zombies. Utilising specific examples, they demonstrated how tourism development reflects the horror present in the zombie genre. For example, the impact of zombiism is often presented as a pandemic affecting the entire globe, spreading quickly as a result of human selfishness fuelled by air travel, etc., (considering the ending of *Army of the Dead* [6], or how the virus spreads in *28 Weeks Later* [7]. So, too, does tourism spread its impacts through air-travel (e.g., the increase in tourism arrivals following the rise of low-cost airlines). Or, consider the example of the digital nomad tourists who avoided lockdowns and borders during the pandemic [8], thereby potentially carrying the virus to other destinations.

As overtourism is now proving to be as 'unkillable' as any zombie plague, can this be addressed by the similarities between tourists and zombies? For example, the use of tourism checkpoints by the Venetian authorities is similar to the use of zombie checkpoints by the Israeli government in *World War Z* [9]. Albeit, only providing a temporary solution that does not hold. For many of the stories within the genre, the solution involves living with the threat— zombies remain ever present, but the protagonists are still able to live some sort of life. Is this, therefore, the answer to overtourism, with an integration of the threat into the destination? Or should there be a return to the attitude that tourism is a privilege, not a right, which reflects the quasi-industrial society adopted by many in the zombie genre.

This approach is not merely speculation; it is accepted that popular culture can be exploited to identify creative responses to challenges and situations [10]. Given that tourism continues to develop uncontrollably, it is clear that new approaches to tourism thinking are now required. Using popular culture and one specific genre, zombiism, may prove to be an unusual, but powerful ally in the development of sustainable tourism.

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Workplace toxicity during disruptions

Alisha Ali and Judith Chomitz

Alisha Ali, Sheffield Business School, Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom, is a social scientist researching sustainable development in tourism and hospitality, focusing on information and communication technologies, innovation, work environments and education. Her doctoral research defined a new research domain of Information and Communication Technologies for Sustainable Tourism, and her textbook on this has been described as a 'landmark publication'. She has experience in research design, which led to her involvement in several contract research projects working with government offices, destination management organisations (DMOs) and

international, national, and local businesses.

Workplace toxicity refers to low-intensity deviant behaviour, and is often described as a 'social pollution' [1]. Toxic behaviours are rude and discourteous, and have been equated to workplace bullying [2, 3], as they display a lack of regard for the victims or the witnesses. Due to its ambiguous nature, workplace incivility is difficult to detect, and this can cause more stress for the victim who may agonise over interpretations of the behaviours [2]. Examples may include witnessing or experiencing exclusion, sexual intimidation, rumours, and condescension [3]. The turbulent hotel work climate is potentially the perfect breeding ground for toxicity to develop [4] as it is argued that the hospitality industry harbours one of the highest levels of employee incivility. This situation has been attributed to the working conditions, such as the long hours, low pay, heavy workloads, and high levels of emotional labour [5, 6].

The Covid-19 pandemic amplified feelings of stress and threat amongst hospitality employees due to uncertainty over loss of income, fears about the future, and social distancing, which undermined both physical and psychological health [7]. Workplace toxicity is more likely to develop in periods of tension and disruption, such as those experienced by many hotel organisations during the pandemic [4]. The fact that the mental health issues caused by disruptions that manifest in the workplace (e.g., anger, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, fear, insomnia, stress, and confusion) [8], can be the cause of significant negative outcomes, has often been overlooked. Research that details the negative impacts of Covid-19 on workers and the workplace, continues across disciplines, including psychiatry [8,9], and business [10,11]. A substantive multidisciplinary approach has also considered the different aspects of the effects of toxicity on both workers and the workplace; in particular, the negative impacts on both mental health in the workplace, and on the bottom line [12,13]. However, to the researchers' knowledge, little has been published on bringing these two themes together to understand the impact on hotels. As employees are a business's largest single investment, it is important that hotels have available the information and tools to combat and minimise the effects of mental health issues, thereby allowing for a strong and resilient recovery from periods of disruption.

To understand this knowledge gap, the authors undertook a

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scoping study, which reviewed the literature on the pandemic, toxic workplaces, psychological well-being, and the hospitality industry. The aim of this research was to identify whether the mental health impacts caused by a disruption such as the pandemic, can lead to, or contribute to increases in the number of toxic hotel workplaces The literature elucidated that a pandemic would likely escalate the growth of toxic work environments; it also revealed that a combination of mental health stressors plus toxicity would multiply the potential for negative consequences to workers' mental health [14]. It is possible that throughout the pandemic, hotel work environments have been a hotbed for toxicity to develop, leading to a new type of workplace culture that is unhealthy for hotel staff and the industry, necessitating further primary research to confirm the literature review findings, and identify practical solutions. The first step, as shown in the literature pertaining to workplace toxicity, is to prioritise health and well-being in the workplace, so that employees feel valued, safe, and comfortable [15]. For instance, offering guidance and training, fostering camaraderie by organising outings for team building, and developing new policies and programmes, such as mediation procedures, to combat toxicity in the workplace [16]. Managers can also be positive role models by adopting a no-tolerance attitude towards workplace toxicity, holding offenders accountable. Likewise, they should reward positive workplace behaviours.

This study sheds some light on hotel workplace toxicity while providing recommendations for hoteliers to understand the broader psychological impacts that crises, such as the pandemic, can have on employees, thereby mitigating future shocks.

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