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Essential generic attributes for enhancing the employability of hospitality management graduates

Abstract

The challenge of developing employable graduates is regarded as one of the most significant challenges facing contemporary higher education in hospitality management. This study aims to address this challenge by proposing a set of generic attributes for enhancing the employability of hospitality management graduates in South Africa. An extensive, qualitative content analysis of 21 generic skills frameworks, 17 hospitality-related research studies and six hospitality management curricula identified attributes that could enhance graduates' employability. The importance of these attributes towards the enhancement of hospitality management graduates' employability in South Africa was evaluated by 39 Delphi panellists over four rounds. This led to the proposal of a generic attribute framework consisting of 90 generic attributes. These attributes were categorised into five generic attribute domains, namely the fundamental (n=8), people (n=21); thinking (n=11); personal (n=41) and other (n=9) domains. As a directive for enhancing the employability of hospitality management graduates, the competence framework can play an important role in curriculum development; it can be used as a set of standards to judge the employability of graduates against; it can assist to engage students in the process of enhancing their employability; and could serve as a clear description to potential employers of the knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes that can be expected from hospitality management graduates. It is recommended that hospitality management academics and employers take note of the important curriculum and employability implications the study can have on the development of hospitality management graduates. The framework can be used as a basis for the enhancement of hospitality management graduates' employability in other parts of the world.

Key words: generic attribute(s); hospitality; higher education; employability; South Africa

Introduction

Hospitality education providers around the world are often criticized by employers for their inability to produce employable graduates (Munar & Montaña, 2009). Employers, on the one hand, often claim that hospitality education providers put too much emphasis on pass rates as a measure of effectiveness and not on employment and employability. On the other hand, some education providers are of the opinion that it is not their responsibility to "produce a work ready individual" (Grant Thornton, 2007,

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p. 13). These differences in opinion contribute to a situation where graduates are not able "to make a smooth transition from the classroom to the world of work" (Grant Thornton, 2007, p. 27). The reluctance or inability of education providers to provide employable graduates fundamentally implies that hospitality management graduates have not developed the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that make them likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations (Yorke, 2006).

Although graduates' employability can be enhanced in a number of ways, Barrie (2012) emphasises the importance of developing a set of generic skills or attributes in graduates. Countries such as Australia, the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK) and South Africa highlight the "generic", "transferable" or "non-contextualised" nature of generic attributes. These countries have developed generic skills frameworks that prescribe the attributes that need to be developed in all graduates, irrespective of the discipline being studied.

The obligation of placing equal emphasis on a specific set of generic attributes for all study disciplines can, however, be contested. Different disciplines could require greater or lesser emphasis on some of the attributes often labelled as generic attributes. Although of value, the generic skills frameworks can also not be seen as the utopia of attributes that could enhance hospitality management graduates' employability. The curricula of leading international hospitality schools and previous research on the attributes that can be expected of hospitality management graduates can also shed light on this issue. It is therefore no surprise that specific sets of generic attributes have been proposed for graduates in, for example, law (Christensen & Kift, 2000) and accounting (Tempone, Kavanagh, Segal, Hancock, Howieson & Kent, 2012) graduates.

Previous studies focused on the attributes required of managers, and on employees working in different subsectors and pursuing different careers in the hospitality industry. Other studies provide a narrow and in-depth focus on a specific competence such as foreign-language ability and business ethics. However, limited research has been conducted on the generic attributes required of contemporary hotel and hospitality management graduates.

Some of the studies lack a theoretical underpinning, and employed either a quantitative or qualitative research design when a mixed-methods design would have been more suitable to address the research problems (Kwok, Adams & Feng, 2012); other studies overemphasize hospitality managers' expectations and ignore the perceptions of graduates and academics. Most studies adopted a management-competency framework instead of generic skills frameworks to identify the attributes or competencies that are expected of hospitality managers and graduates (Raybould & Wilkins, 2005). Furthermore, the studies were conducted in developed countries, such as the USA and Australia, and were therefore not contextualized to the specific South African hospitality industry and higher education (HE) environment.

The South African tourism industry has grown considerably since the country's democratisation in 1994. The industry makes a substantial contribution towards South Africa's economy and employment. The 2012 Tourism Satellite Account (TSA), prepared by Statistics South Africa (STATSSA, 2012, p. 8), estimated that the tourism industry contributed approximately three per cent, or R67 billion, to South Africa's GDP in 2010. The TSA furthermore estimated that more than 538 394 people, or approximately 4.1 per cent of South Africa's employees, were directly employed by the tourism industry during the same year.

South African HE faces a number of challenges in providing suitably qualified graduates to business and industry. A survey of fifty countries placed South Africa's school system fiftieth in terms of quality, participation rate, completion rate and level of competency. South African learners entering HE lack foundational skills such as reading, writing, numeracy and speaking skills (Jansen, 2006). These inadequacies relate in part to the fact that English (the medium of instruction in HE institutions) is a second or foreign language for most South African HE students (Jaffer, Ng'ambi & Czerniewicz, 2007), and lingering effects of apartheid, exemplified by an inferior primary and secondary school education for black learners (Colborn, 1995).

The employability challenge, the limitations evident in available studies, and specific demands of the South African context paved the way for the research question of this article, namely, what generic attributes are essential for enhancing hospitality management graduates' employability in South Africa?

The research reported in this article forms part of a bigger study that ultimately aimed to propose a comprehensive competence model for enhancing the employability of hospitality management graduates in South Africa. This article focuses specifically on the generic attributes of the model. The article commences with a conceptualization of the generic attribute concept in different countries. An exposition is provided of the mixed-methods research design and methodology used to propose a comprehensive set of generic attributes and to have them evaluated by a team of experts in order to come up with a framework of generic attributes that are essential for enhancing hospitality management graduates' employability in the South Africa. The findings of the qualitative content analysis and Delphi evaluation are discussed and the article concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings.

Theoretical background

The theoretical background of this study focuses on the conceptualization of the generic attribute concept in Australia, UK, USA and South Africa provides. An overview is also provided of previous studies that identified desirable generic attributes of hospitality management graduates.

Generic skills frameworks

The generic skills frameworks of Australia, USA, UK and South Africa are relevant to this study, because the frameworks were developed from an employment-related perspective (Smith & Comyn, 2003) and therefore provide excellent examples of essential knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that can form part of a set of generic attributes for hospitality management graduates.

Australia

Australia is regarded as the leader in research and initiatives to address generic skills (EGFSNS, 2006). Several government commissioned research projects (Karmel, 1985; Finn, 1991; Mayer, 1992; Candy, Crebert & O'Leary, 1994; Field & Mawer, 1996; West, 1998; Hambur, Rowe & Luc, 2000; AC-NRS, 2000; ACER, 2001; ESFRG, 2002; A DEEWR, 2008) investigated the generic skills concept before the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was revised in 2011 to make provision for the incorporation of generic learning outcomes (also known as graduate attributes or capabilities) in the

development process of qualifications. These generic learning outcomes or graduate attributes are defined as "transferable, non-discipline specific skills a graduate may achieve through learning that have application in study, work and life contexts" (AQFC, 2011, p. 93). The four broad generic learning outcomes of the AQF (AQFC, 2011) that need to be incorporated in all qualifications from Level One (certificate one) to Level Ten (doctoral degree) are the following: fundamental skills (e.g. literacy and numeracy); people skills (e.g. working with others and communication skills); thinking skills (e.g. learning to learn, decision-making skills and problem solving); and personal skills (e.g. self-direction and integrity).

United States of America

The generic skills concept was initiated in the USA during the late 1980s, when the USA Department of Labor became concerned about young people leaving school without the required competence to find and hold a good job. The American Society for Training and Development commissioned an investigation into the demands of the work-place to determine whether the current and future workforce was capable of meeting those demands. The empirical study by Carnevale, Gainer and Meltzer (1990) found that employers regard the following 16 skills as extremely important: learning, reading, writing, computation, speaking, listening, problem-solving, creativity, self-esteem, motivation and goal-setting, personal and career development, interpersonal skills; negotiation, teamwork, organizational effectiveness, and leadership.

Following the study by Carnevale *et al.* (1990), the USA Department of Labor founded the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), which investigated the skills that employers require for employment. They called these skills "workplace know-how". The SCANS (1991) report identified the following five workplace competencies: effective allocation of resources; interpersonal skills; information; systems; and technology. SCANS (1991) identified three foundation skills that were embedded in each of the five competencies, namely, basic skills (reading, writing, mathematics, speaking and listening); higher-order thinking skills (the ability to learn, reason, think creatively, make decisions and solve problems) and personal qualities (individual responsibility, self-esteem and self-management, sociability, and integrity).

Overtom (2000) regards the studies by Carnevale *et al.* (1990) and SCANS (1991) as foundational work and as benchmarks for other international, national, state, regional and local studies. Despite the impact of the seminal SCANS report (1991) on other international studies, the Employability Skills for the Future Reference Group (ESFRG, 2002) stated that, around the year 2000, USA developments started focusing on job-specific skill development and not on generic skills development. This trend can be attributed to industry concerns about specific labour shortages and it is in contrast to developments in other countries, such as the UK.

United Kingdom

The five core skills (communication, numeracy, information technology, working with others and personal skills) of the UK National Council for Vocational Qualifications are viewed as generic skills that are transferable to other areas and contexts, and are consequently "independent of any particular subject, discipline or occupation" (Jessup, Burke, Wolf & Oates, 1990).

The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE) identified four key skills, which are described as the "key to the future success of graduates whatever they intend to do later in life" (NCIHE, 1996, par. 9.19). NCIHE (1996) emphasizes that the key skills (communication skills, numeracy, the use of information technology and learning how to learn) are not only relevant for employment, but throughout a person's life. It was the Committee's vision that the key skills be integrated into HE curricula and that the skills should be developed in all HE graduates.

In response to the NCIHE report (1996) and employers' concern about young recruits' lack of essential skills, so-called Key Skills Qualifications were offered in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (UK DfES, 2010) and Core Skills Qualifications in Scotland (SQA, 2003). The core skills of Scotland are similar to the key skills, but the key skill related to the improvement of one's own learning and performance is excluded (SQA, 2003).

South Africa

In 1997, the Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education emphasized the importance of generic skills (RSA DoE, 1997) and in 1998 South Africa was introduced to the concept of critical cross-field educational and training outcomes.

The regulations in terms of the South African Qualifications Authority Act 58 of 1995 (RSA, 1998) identified seven critical outcomes that need to be developed in all graduates, namely, problem solving, teamwork, managing oneself, the collection, analysis and organization of information, communication, the use of science and technology, and an understanding of the world as a set of related systems. Higher Education South Africa and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) commissioned Griesel and Parker (2009, p. 2) to investigate, amongst others, the attributes that employers regard as important and that employers expect graduates to have when they enter employment. The study identified 22 such attributes and six constructs that agreed to a large extent with the critical outcomes of SAQA.

Previous studies

As far as could be ascertained, only the study of Raybould and Wilkens (2005) adopted a generic framework, namely the Australian ESFRG (2002), to determine the attributes that hospitality managers value when recruiting graduates. Nine of the top ten skills valued by 371 industry managers were categorized in the interpersonal, problem-solving and self-management skills domains.

Other studies in the past ten years that investigated the attributes expected of hospitality management graduates did not employ generic skills frameworks, but used, for example, existing competency models (Chung-Herrera, Enz & Lankau, 2003; Huang & Lin, 2010); previous studies and literature (Chan & Coleman, 2004); feedback from hospitality managers (Chung-Herrera *et al.*, 2003) and focus-group discussions (Tesone & Ricci, 2005). Some of the attributes identified by the studies can be labelled as generic attributes and include, for example, a professional attitude, honesty, communication in a foreign language (Chan & Coleman, 2004), self-management, critical thinking, communication, interpersonal skills (Chung-Herrera *et al.*, 2003), teamwork, prioritizing the needs of others over needs of self, empathy (Tesone & Ricci, 2005), logical thinking, learning how to learn, foreign-language skills, conducting and facilitating interviews, appreciating and learning beautiful things, using computer

process documents, planning a personal career and using body language (Huang & Lin, 2010). Horng and Lu (2006) incorporated students in their sample and Huang and Lin (2010) academics, while the studies of Chung-Herrera *et al.* (2003), Chan and Coleman (2004) and Tesone and Ricci (2005) emphasised the perceptions and experiences of hospitality managers.

Methodology

The research design and methodology employed in the study were instrumental in achieving the aim of the study, namely to identify the generic attributes that are regarded as essential for enhancing the employability of hospitality management graduates in South Africa.

A mixed-methods research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) was adopted; which enabled the researchers to incorporate the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative designs. Generic attributes were identified by means of a qualitative content analysis process and the Delphi technique was used to evaluate the importance of these attributes towards the enhancement of hospitality management graduates in South Africa.

Content analysis

Generic attributes were collected from three main sources, namely (i) the 21 generic skills frameworks of Australia, USA, UK and South Africa that were highlighted in the theoretical background; (ii) 17 hospitality-related research articles; and (iii) six hospitality management curricula.

A total of 152 articles were selected from ten journals who met specific inclusion criteria. The articles were then examined qualitatively by reading through the abstract of each article and 17 articles were regarded to be of value to this study.

Reputational case sampling (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) was used and the baccalaureate curricula of the top five hospitality management schools in the world, as identified by the research conducted by Taylor Nelson Sofres Travel and Tourism (2010), were considered for content analysis purposes. Following email requests, the researchers were provided with detailed curricula of four of these schools. The two hospitality management curricula that hotel schools in South Africa use were also included in the content analysis purposes.

Qualitative content analysis procedures were then employed. McMillan and Schumacher (2006, p. 364) describe content analysis as "a relatively systematic process of coding, categorising, and interpreting data to provide explanations of a single phenomenon of interest". At the end of the content analysis process, a comprehensive set of generic graduate attributes was proposed. The importance of these attributes towards the enhancement of hospitality management graduates in South Africa was evaluated by employing the Delphi technique.

Delphi evaluation

The Delphi technique is defined by Dalkey and Helmer (1963, p. 458) as a method to "obtain the most reliable consensus of opinion of a group of experts... by a series of intensive questionnaires interspersed

with controlled opinion feedback". This technique was selected because it has proven itself as a successful competency-modelling method (Syme-Grant, Stewart & Ker, 2005); is generally regarded to be valid and reliable (Engels & Powell-Kennedy, 2007); the opinions of experts can be obtained from participants who are geographically apart (De Villiers, De Villiers & Kent, 2005); and has the ability to elicit both quantitative and qualitative data (Du Plessis & Human, 2007).

Specific procedures were followed to set up a Delphi panel of experts, to decide on the number of Delphi rounds, to develop the Delphi questionnaires, and to collect the data.

Delphi panel

A sample size ($n=36$) that was bigger than the rule of thumb of 15 to 30 panellists (De Villiers *et al.*, 2005) was aimed for. Sixty experts who met specific inclusion criteria were invited and requested to complete an informed-consent form to confirm their participation in the study. Thirty-nine experts agreed to participate and were made up of hospitality industry professionals ($n=14$); hospitality management academics ($n=15$) from six different higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa; and hospitality management alumni ($n=10$) from four different HEIs. The panellists were from different regions in South Africa and their ages varied from 22 (hospitality alumnus) to 60 years (hospitality management academic).

Number of rounds

The number of Delphi rounds was determined by applying three stopping criteria. Firstly, the Delphi process was stopped when an acceptable degree of consensus was reached among panellists for a specific attribute. There seems to be no agreed-upon or universal level of consensus (Van Zolingen & Klaassen, 2003); and in line with the recommendation of Tigelaar, Dolmans, Wolfhagenand and Van der Vleuten (2004), the researchers accepted 75 per cent as an acceptable degree of consensus. Delphi panellists were therefore not required to rate the attribute in the next round. Secondly, the Delphi process was stopped when stability in the distribution of the group's responses was obtained (Linstone & Turoff, 1975) in Round Three for a specific attribute. The responses of Round Three were tested for stability against those of Round Two at the five per cent level of significance. Fisher's exact test was used and a significant difference in the responses of Delphi panellists ($p<0.05$) indicated that stability in responses had not been reached. Thirdly, the Delphi process would stop after the fourth and final round, the traditional number of rounds for a Delphi technique.

Questionnaires

The generic attributes identified by the content analysis process were used to develop a quantitative survey. Respondents were, among others, requested to rate the importance of the identified generic attributes towards the enhancement of hospitality management graduates' employability on the following scale: 1=Unnecessary, 2=Useful, and 3=Essential (Linstone & Turoff, 1975).

Respondents were further requested to provide, as far as possible, comments next to each of the attribute statements, and they could add additional attributes at the end of the questionnaire. Qualitative data was thus also generated.

As suggested by Hasson, Keeney and McKenna (2000), the Delphi questionnaire was pilot tested before the Delphi process commenced. The pilot-study participants consisted of one hospitality sector professional, one hospitality management academic and one hospitality management alumnus with similar characteristics as the Delphi panellists.

Data collection

The electronic distribution and collection of questionnaires for the four rounds of the Delphi took place over three months. In the cases where respondents did not respond within the time limit, reminder emails and telephone calls were used to increase the response rate.

Median scores and the distribution of the group's response over the three importance categories were calculated by means of an Excel spreadsheet. The descriptive statistics and qualitative comments provided by experts were recorded and provided to panellists in the next round.

Response rates

Although the hospitality industry is well known for its low response rates to questionnaires (Ravichandran & Arendt, 2008), high response rates were calculated for Rounds One (100%) to Four (88% of the original 39 panellists) of the Delphi evaluation. Only eight participants withdrew from the study during the course of the four rounds by not returning completed questionnaires.

Results

A total of 1,129 generic attributes were collected from the 44 documents. Some of these attributes overlapped and different words were sometimes used to define the same attributes. The attributes were studied carefully; coded in an open deductive process, connections sought, and then categorized into one of five attribute domains. The researchers adopted the wording of the four broad learning outcomes of the AQF (2011) to identify the fundamental, people, thinking and personal attribute domains. Attributes that could not be categorized into one of these four attribute domains were categorized into the "Other generic attribute domain". The researchers performed content analysis, axial, and selective coding (Schreier, 2012) to reconnect, regroup and reduce the initial attributes. A comprehensive set of generic graduate attributes was proposed.

The importance of these attributes towards the enhancement of hospitality management graduates' employability was evaluated by the Delphi panel and additional attributes were identified by panellists. Ninety attributes were categorized as Essential by employing consensus as a stopping criterion over four rounds. Stability in the responses of panellists was not obtained for any of the attributes evaluated. A brief description of the ninety attributes that were categorized into the five attribute domains is provided in the sections that follow.

Fundamental attribute domain

The inductive analysis of the attributes categorized into the fundamental attribute identified four sub-domains, namely literacy, numeracy, technical, and technological skills. Barrie (2012, p. 83) perceives

most generic attributes to be context dependent, but regards literacy and numeracy as truly generic. The other attributes can to a certain extent be influenced by the hospitality industry. Technological and information technology skills can, for example, be required of graduates to use a property information management system such as Opera.

More than 75 percent of panellist agreed that the eight attributes, as reflected in Table 1, was essential for enhanced employability and the attributes were consequently categorized as Essential.

Table 1

Fundamental attribute domain

Sub-domain	Code	Attribute	Distribution of responses			Round
			Unnecessary	Useful	Essential	
Literacy	LIT01	General English writing skills	0%	13%	87%	1
	LIT02	Skills to write emails, memos, letters and reports in English	0%	8%	92%	1
	LIT03	English reading skills	0%	18%	82%	1
Numeracy	NUM01	Numeracy skills	0%	18%	82%	1
Technological	TEC01	Technological skills	0%	18%	82%	1
	TEC02	Information technology skills	0%	18%	82%	1
	TEC03	Skills to collect, analyse, organise and use	0%	18%	82%	1
Technical	TEH01	Technical skills	0%	25%	75%	3

Considering the under-preparedness of school-leavers for entering HE, the categorizing of the literacy (LIT01 to LIT03) and numeracy (NUM01) attributes as Essential made sense.

Although the hospitality industry is not a technology-focused sector, the information-intensive nature of the sector requires the use of technology (Law & Jogaratnam, 2005; Leung & Law, 2005). The demand for information technology skills (TEC02) implies that it can be expected of hospitality management graduates to understand the role of computer hardware and software, and that graduates should be proficient in word processing, building worksheets, designing presentations, browsing the World Wide Web and sending emails. The importance of technology skills is supported by the Skills Audit of 2007 that revealed that up to 75 per cent of tourism sector small, medium and micro enterprise owner managers reported a deficiency in information technology skills (Grant Thornton, 2007).

Technical skills play an important role in, for example, housekeeping, food preparation and serving guests. The researchers were therefore surprised that technical skills were, contrary to the other attributes in the fundamental attribute domain, rated as Essential in Round Three and not Round One.

People attribute domain

The communication and social intelligence attribute sub-domains were identified from the inductive analysis of attributes categorized into the people attribute domain.

Communication attributes

Eight (COM01 to COM08) of the twenty communication attributes identified by the content analysis, were categorized as Essential by employing consensus as a stopping criterion in Rounds One, Three and Four. Two additional attributes (COM09 and COM10) were identified by panellists in Round One and consensus was used as a stopping criterion to categorize these attributes as Essential in the next round.

Table 2
Communication attribute sub-domain

Code	Attribute	Distribution of responses			Round
		Unnecessary	Useful	Essential	
COM01	Communication skills	0%	0%	100%	1
COM02	Listening skills	0%	3%	97%	1
COM03	English speaking skills	0%	10%	90%	1
COM04	English presentation skills	0%	22%	78%	3
COM05	Telephone skills	0%	8%	92%	1
COM06	Non-verbal expression skills	7%	16%	77%	4
COM07	Intercultural communication skills	0%	18%	82%	1
COM08	Skills to direct meetings	3%	20%	77%	2
COM09	Job interview skills	6%	17%	77%	2
COM10	Communicating a viewpoint at a meeting or discussion	3%	20%	77%	2

English is the universal language of communication within the international hospitality industry (Andrews, 2009). It is furthermore the second language of the majority of South Africans and the most understood language in South Africa (South African Government Information, 2012). It therefore makes sense that panellists regard an acceptable level of English competency as Essential for enhancing graduates' employability.

The importance of communication skills in the South African hospitality industry was also highlighted in the latest Tourism and Sport Skills Audit that was conducted in 2007. The audit showed that all hospitality occupational categories experienced a skills gap in the full range of communication skills (Grant Thornton, 2007).

The impact of cultural differences on communication cannot be ignored (Hearns, Devine & Baum, 2007). Although 82 per cent of the panellists rated intercultural communication skills as Essential, the 12 attributes relating to foreign and indigenous languages were not categorized as Essential. This finding corresponds with the 2007 Tourism and Sport Skills Audit that revealed that only 29 per cent of hospitality employees regard knowledge of a foreign language as an essential skill (Grant Thornton, 2007).

Social intelligence attributes

Boyatzis (2009) regards Social Intelligence (SI) as a prerequisite for outstanding professional performance. SI refers to how people handle relationships; their awareness of others' feeling, needs and concerns; and their success at inducing positive responses in others. SI can therefore be compared to the phrase "working with others" of the AQF (2011). The attributes of this sub-domain were particularly evident in the curricula of the international hospitality schools and the articles selected for content analysis.

Table 3
Social intelligence sub-domain

Code	Attribute	Distribution of responses			Round
		Unnecessary	Useful	Essential	
SOC01	Sensing others' feelings and perspectives, and taking an active interest in their concerns (empathy)	0%	18%	82%	2
SOC02	Reading a group's emotional currents and power relationships (organisational awareness)	0%	18%	82%	1
SOC03	Sensing others' development needs and bolstering their abilities (coaching and mentoring attitude)	0%	32%	68%	4
SOC04	Inspiring and guiding individuals and groups (inspirational leadership)	0%	23%	77%	1
SOC05	Wielding effective tactics for persuasion (influence)	3%	32%	65%	4
SOC06	Negotiating and resolving disagreements (conflict management)	3%	15%	82%	1
SOC07	Working with others toward shared goals (teamwork)	0%	8%	92%	1
SOC08	Creating group synergy in pursuing collective goals (collaboration)	0%	10%	90%	1
SOC09	Interpersonal skills	0%	13%	87%	1
SOC10	A service orientation	0%	5%	95%	1
SOC11	Ability to give and receive feedback	0%	6%	94%	2

Table 3 shows the ten SI attributes (THI01 to THI10) identified by the content analysis process and the additional attribute (THI11) identified by panellists in Round Two, that were categorized as Essential. The final, fourth round was used as a stopping criterion to categorize SOC03 and SOC05. The qualitative data collected from Delphi panellists assisted the researchers in categorizing SOC03 and SOC05 as Essential. A Delphi panellist stated that SOC03 was essential for graduates who are appointed as entry-level managers, since it will enable them to get the most from their subordinates. Another panellist mentioned that graduates should be able to identify employees' strengths and weaknesses. The panellist reasoned that happy and productive employees will be created if graduates could utilize employees' strengths in areas that will benefit the company and if they could coach and mentor employees in those areas that require improvement. The feedback collected from Delphi panellists regarding SOC05 mainly revolved around the significant role that influencing and persuasion plays in the management and training of people, in sales and marketing, and in fostering teamwork and reaching team goals.

Thinking attribute domain

There is a link between the thinking attributes of the AQF (2011) and some of the attributes of the meta-competencies concept. Cheetham and Chivers (1996) describe meta-competencies as those skills that are required to develop other skills (e.g. self-development) or which can enhance or reinforce other skills (e.g. creativity). Meta-competencies therefore represent those generic attributes that overarch other generic attributes. This conception of meta-competencies is in line with the conceptions of other authors (Hall, 1986; Reynolds & Snell, 1988; Linstead, 1991), who acknowledge that some skills are high-level skills that transcend other attributes.

The importance of thinking attributes/skills towards the enhancement of employability is supported by the categorizing of ten thinking attributes as Essential in Round One (see Table 4). Only THI06 was categorized in Round Four as Essential by employing consensus as a stopping criterion.

Table 4
Thinking attribute domain

Code	Attribute	Distribution of responses			Round
		Unnecessary	Useful	Essential	
THI01	Critical thinking	0%	18%	82%	1
THI02	Creativity and innovation	0%	18%	82%	1
THI03	Problem solving skills	0%	10%	90%	1
THI04	Decision making skills	3%	10%	87%	1
THI05	Reflection skills	0%	23%	77%	1
THI06	Reflective and critical reading skills	3%	16%	81%	4
THI07	Learning skills	0%	15%	85%	1
THI08	An inquiring mind	0%	18%	82%	1
THI09	Willingness to learn	0%	8%	92%	1
THI10	Intellectual ability	0%	23%	77%	1
THI11	Self-development	0%	8%	92%	1

Cho, Schmelzer and McMahon (2003) support the categorizing of critical thinking (THI01) as Essential for HE graduates. Although THI02 to THI05 are reflected in Table 4 as individual thinking attributes, Facione and Facione (2007) identifies reflection, creativity and innovation, problem solving and decision making as components of critical thinking.

Despite the presence of the attributes "systems thinking" and "pattern recognition" in SCANS (1991); RSA (1998); West (1998); Chung (2000) and Griesel and Parker (2009), the attributes were merely categorized as Useful.

Personal attribute domain

The ESFRG (2002, pp. 4–7) defines personal attributes as non-skill-based behaviours and attitudes, while the AQF (2011) refers to these attributes as personal skills. Two sub-domains were identified from the content analysis, namely emotional intelligence, and attitudes and values.

Emotional intelligence

Boyatzis (2009, p. 757) defines this concept as "the ability to recognize, understand, and use emotional information about oneself, which leads to effective or superior performance". Goleman (1998) and Pope, Roper and Qualter (2011) emphasize the important role that EI plays in ensuring graduates' employability. This notion is also evident in this study. All nine EI attributes identified were categorized as Essential in Round One (see Table 5).

Table 5
Emotional intelligence sub-domain

Code	Attribute	Distribution of responses			Round
		Unnecessary	Useful	Essential	
EMO01	Emotional intelligence	3%	15%	82%	1
EMO02	Knowing one's internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions (self-awareness)	5%	13%	82%	1
EMO03	Self-confidence	0%	5%	95%	1
EMO04	Managing one's internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions (self-management)	3%	10%	87%	1
EMO05	The ability to keep disruptive emotions and impulses in check (emotional self-control)	3%	10%	87%	1
EMO06	Flexibility in handling change (adaptability)	0%	10%	90%	1
EMO07	Striving to improve or meeting a standard of excellence (achievement orientation)	0%	15%	85%	1
EMO08	Initiative	0%	10%	90%	1
EMO09	Persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks (positive outlook)	3%	15%	82%	1

Attitudes and values

The results show that attitudes and values could play a significant role in enhancing the employability of hospitality management graduates. Five attributes (ATT13 and ATT20 to ATT23) were rated by all Delphi panellists (100%) as Essential in Round One (see Table 6). Attributes ATT01 to ATT27 were identified by the content analysis and categorized as Essential. Only one attribute identified by the content analysis process, namely "An appreciation for the arts and beautiful things", evident in Horng and Lu (2006), was not categorized as Essential.

Table 6
Attitudes and values sub-domain

Code	Attribute	Distribution of responses			Round
		Unnecessary	Useful	Essential	
ATT01	A business orientation	3%	20%	77%	1
ATT02	Ability to deal with criticism	3%	18%	79%	1
ATT03	Ability to deal with stress	0%	3%	97%	1
ATT04	Alertness	0%	13%	87%	1

Table 6 Continued

Code	Attribute	Distribution of responses			Round
		Unneces- sary	Useful	Essential	
ATT05	Awareness of global issues	3%	65%	32%	4
ATT06	Awareness of the world of work	3%	16%	81%	3
ATT07	Being motivated	0%	8%	92%	1
ATT08	Being observative	0%	8%	92%	1
ATT09	Commitment	0%	10%	90%	1
ATT10	Common sense attitude	0%	18%	82%	1
ATT11	Competitiveness	3%	21%	76%	2
ATT12	Cultural sensitivity	3%	15%	82%	1
ATT13	Efficiency	0%	0%	100%	1
ATT14	Embracing diversity	0%	21%	79%	1
ATT15	Enthusiasm	0%	8%	92%	1
ATT16	Ethical thinking	0%	15%	85%	1
ATT17	Integrity and honesty	0%	5%	95%	1
ATT18	Loyalty	3%	13%	84%	1
ATT19	Perseverance	0%	3%	97%	1
ATT20	Professional work attitude	0%	0%	100%	1
ATT21	Projecting a professional image	0%	0%	100%	1
ATT22	Reliability	0%	0%	100%	1
ATT23	Responsibility	0%	0%	100%	1
ATT24	Responsibility towards the environment	3%	18%	79%	1
ATT25	Responsible citizenship	3%	18%	79%	1
ATT26	Self-discipline	0%	10%	90%	1
ATT27	Sense of humour	5%	15%	80%	1
ATT28	Ability to distinguish between business and personal life	0%	18%	82%	2
ATT29	Being dependable	3%	9%	88%	2
ATT30	Being genuinely friendly	3%	21%	76%	2
ATT31	Being independent	3%	18%	79%	2
ATT32	Punctuality	0%	0%	100%	2

Four additional attributes (ATT28 to ATT32) were identified by panellists during Round One and all four were categorized as Essential in Round Two. The importance of ATT28 is, for example, evident when one considers the working hours of hospitality employees. It is no surprise that it has been said that hospitality employees "live to work", while employees in other industries "work to live" (Tesone, 2010, p. 360).

The important role that attitudes can play in enhancing hospitality management graduates' employability is summarized by the statement of Tesone and Ricci (2006, p. 67) that it has "been anecdotally noted that some hospitality managers believe in hiring for 'attitude' and training for knowledge and skills".

Other generic attributes

The researchers found it difficult to categories five attributes (GEN01 to GEN04) evident from the content analysis process and an additional five attributes (GEN05 tot GEN9) identified by panel-lists during Round One into one of the four attribute domains discussed above. These attributes are reflected in Table 7 and relate to a certain extent to the key competency of planning and organizing of Mayer (1992). All ten attributes were categorized as Essential by employing consensus as a stopping criterion in Rounds and Two.

Table 7

Other generic attribute domain

Code	Attribute	Distribution of responses			Round
		Unneces- sary	Useful	Essential	
GEN01	Ability to deal with ambiguity	3%	20%	77%	1
GEN02	Ability to judge appropriate behaviour	0%	15%	85%	1
GEN03	Ability to work in multi-task environments	0%	10%	90%	1
GEN04	Time management skills	0%	8%	92%	1
GEN05	Office administration skills	3%	21%	76%	2
GEN06	Productive and hardworking	0%	5%	95%	1
GEN07	High energy levels	0%	15%	85%	2
GEN08	Ability to complete tasks quickly	0%	21%	79%	2
GEN09	Ability to provide work of high quality	3%	6%	91%	2

Conclusion and implications

Contrary to previous studies, a holistic approach was followed by identifying, from 21 generic skills frameworks, 17 hospitality-related research studies and the six curricula of leading international and South African hospitality schools, generic attributes that could enhance the employability of hospitality management graduates in South Africa. The views of hospitality management alumni, academics and professionals were also incorporated.

Although the researchers took effort to enhance the trustworthiness and the validity and reliability of the research processes, as with any study, there remained certain limitations. While the researchers took care in selecting the generic attributes in the documents according to predetermined criteria, subjectivity could have played a role. The researchers furthermore acknowledge that some of the attributes in the framework may overlap and be interrelated to one another, and that the generic attributes and domains could have been organized differently by other researchers or in other instances.

Despite the potential limitations, a distinctive generic attribute framework for enhancing hospitality management graduates' employment has been proposed. This framework can play an important role in curriculum development and has value for hospitality education providers, professionals and researchers. Although it is not necessary to explicitly include all the identified generic attributes in a curriculum, it is recommended that academics ensure (through appropriate teaching and learning, and assessment practices) that students have mastered the attributes before a baccalaureate degree in hospitality management is awarded to them. In addition, in further research, appropriate teaching and learning strategies can be identified; and the forms of assessment and evaluations that will be most suited for the development of the identified attributes can be described.

The proposed framework can also be used as a set of standards to judge the employability of hospitality education providers' graduates against. By performing formative employability evaluations, HEIs can identify the specific graduate attributes that require further development. The results of the evaluation studies, if favourable, could also be used as an important selling point to recruit quality students that could in turn lead to higher levels of graduate employability.

The framework, if communicated effectively to students, can assist students to engage in the process of enhancing their employability. It could enable them to know what is expected of them and to monitor and reflect on their personal development. The student-lecturer relationship could also be improved as students might see lecturers as coaches and facilitators who are committed to help them to reach the expected attributes and to enhance their employability.

The framework can also serve as a clear description to potential employers of the attributes that can be expected from hospitality management graduates.

The study provides a foundation which can be used to further explore generic attributes in the hospitality management context. The relative importance of each of the identified attribute domains and attributes in the framework towards the enhancement of graduates' employability could be determined through a quantitative research approach by employing, for example, factor analysis. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the implemented generic attribute framework could provide an excellent opportunity for further research; and the employability levels of hospitality management graduates at different HEIs could be evaluated against the attributes in the proposed framework in order to identify best teaching and learning practices at those HEIs that are successful in producing graduates with high levels of employability.

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