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The Perfect Mix: Teaching Bartending Skills through Job Shadowing and Interdisciplinarity

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Objectives | This paper aims to describe an interdisciplinary project involving 2nd year hotel management and catering and restaurant management students, which focused on fostering experiential learning opportunities through job shadowing and hands-on experiments within the scope of cocktail making. Working closely with bartenders and mixologists, students were challenged to interview and accompany these professionals, having had the chance to not only experience and observe their workplace and tasks, but also collect information on their signature cocktails and insights on the skills required to become a professional in the sector. Based on this contact, students were then asked to reinterpret these signature cocktails, by creating their own mixes, having to come up with two original proposals. Given the content of the courses involved in the project, in addition to drawing from their mentors' experience and expertise, these cocktails must also address the topic of sustainability and innovation in that one of the proposals must include wine as the main ingredient. These cocktails were subject to a final public presentation before a panel of experts who provided feedback on students' final proposals.

Methodology | In addition to observation and documentary research, relying mostly on information collected by students during their job shadowing experience (e.g., diaries short bios, data sheets and wine/drink menus), the paper also draws on different questionnaires applied to mentors and students taking part in the project. These questionnaires, which included both closed and open-ended questions, focused not only on the participants' overall expectations regarding the project, but also on what they perceived to be the most important skills in bartending and cocktail making. The data was collected and analyzed using a mixed approach, making it possible to crosscut the different perspectives, as to better understand the project's affordances and areas of improvement, as well as to lay the foundations for future collaborations with the industry.

Main results and contributions | Considering the project's main objectives, job shadowing proved to be an effective method, having had a positive effect on students' learning experiences

and how they perceived the overall project. Having spent time interacting with and observing trained professionals in their daily tasks, students had the opportunity to gain firsthand knowledge of industry practices, and the skills required for the job, having put them into use while preparing and presenting their own creations. Despite some initial concerns regarding time management and their interaction with the mentors, students were, for the most part, able to fulfill all the required assignments, having succeeded in making their final presentations before a panel of experts. Moreover, the data also suggests that the project was instrumental in making students more aware of the importance of soft skills, particularly communication, bringing them closer to the mentors' (and the market's) expectations. Another key impact was on students' overall perceptions on the importance of interdisciplinary projects within the scope of their training. Whereas they initially disagreed with the premise that this type of project could enhance their learning, the final questionnaires revealed a more positive stance towards interdisciplinarity, with students making reference to the importance of interaction, collaboration and hands-on learning experiences within this scope. As for the topic of sustainability, the impact was not as significant, with students having already had some knowledge on the topic, albeit more theoretical.

Limitations | As the first iteration of the project has only now been completed, findings are tentative and cannot be easily transferred to other settings. On the other hand, the analysis presented is mostly based on observation and on participants' perceptions, making it necessary to further complement the data as to avoid potential bias. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the project and the students' final presentations have received positive feedback from stakeholders and local partners. As a result, future work will include a more in-depth analysis of the material collected by students, as well as additional feedback from experts that can help further validate this approach.

Conclusions | Framed within the scope of experiential learning, job shadowing is considered to facilitate immersive learning experiences, in that participants are able to actively engage in authentic workplace environments and receive guidance from mentors, thus developing a deeper understanding of the tasks they will be required to perform. Having identified a gap when it comes to hospitality students' bartending and cocktail making training, the project described within this paper aimed to address this challenge by allowing students to observe and interact with experienced professionals. In addition to describing the project itself, the paper drew on mentors' and students' perceptions, having demonstrated its potential within the scope of tourism and hospitality education. Moreover, researchers were able to establish the importance of university-industry collaboration and experiential learning in promoting students' awareness on the importance of softs skills, thus making a contribution to the field of tourism education and paving the way for future research and work within this scope.

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