

ASSESSING THE HOSPITALITY ENTREPRENEUR'S ROLE IN IMPLEMENTING THE TRAINING NEED OF A SMALL BUSINESS: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

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Abstract

The entrepreneur has a vital role in shaping training initiatives in small hospitality businesses, emphasising training's strategic importance for enhancing employee skills and business adaptability. This research underscores the entrepreneurial mindset towards training, illustrating how a growth-oriented approach significantly influences the willingness to invest in staff development, thereby ensuring alignment with prevailing business exigencies and sector-specific demands. Training commitment is crucial for providing staff with the necessary abilities, thus ensuring smooth adjustment to shifting market trends. However, the study reveals a visible reluctance among certain entrepreneurs towards initiating training programs, predominantly attributed to a false sense of competency sufficiency within the existing workforce and apprehensions concerning financial outlays. Employing Constructivist Ground Theory, this study meticulously uncovers entrepreneurs' perceptions concerning on-the-job training, elucidating how experiential knowledge acquired through entrepreneurial endeavours is effectively harnessed to inform and shape training methods. The research findings demonstrate the multifaceted benefits of training, notably in bridging the competency gaps between current employee performance levels and job specifications, fostering enhanced self-esteem, boosting confidence, and promoting inclusivity among staff. The study further illustrates the positive ramifications of such training interventions on overall business performance, as evidenced by diminished staff attrition rates and amplified revenue figures. A pivotal revelation of this research was the identification of three interrelated elements fundamental to successful training ventures within small and medium-scale enterprises: meticulously crafted training modules, distinct employee characteristics, and the prevailing work milieu. The research advocates for the formulation of compelling training frameworks that reflect the entrepreneur's understanding and adjusting the workforce competencies. The engagement level of employees in the training continuum and the quality of the workplace environment emerge as crucial determinants influencing the success of training initiatives.

Keywords: hospitality training, entrepreneurial role, small business, employee development, training design

JEL Classification: M12, M53, J24

1. INTRODUCTION

In the competitive hospitality industry, dominated by small-to-medium-sized enterprises, substantial knowledge is essential for success (Nafukho et al., 2017). Entrepreneurs within this sector emphasise on-the-job training to keep their workforce adaptable and proficient amidst varying economic conditions. Training is unanimously regarded as crucial for enhancing guest experiences and achieving business goals (Hyasat et al., 2022), serving both for skill development and behavioural adjustment (Dixit and Sinha, 2022). The research underscores the importance of aligning training with organisational objectives to maximise its effectiveness. Utilising a grounded theory approach, this study aims to investigate the entrepreneur's critical role in leading training efforts, addressing the changing needs of their employees, and providing actionable insights and strategies to improve training practices in hospitality small businesses.

There are significant gaps in the efficacy and pertinence of training within the hospitality industry. A notable gap is the "transfer problem" where the application of learned skills falls short, rendering the training ineffective due to a misalignment with actual requirements. Further

emphasis is placed on the disconnect between the training needs of hospitality employees and the training delivered, with current methods critiqued for their lack of structure and content.

This research endeavours to delve into the entrepreneur's pivotal role in orchestrating training initiatives within small hospitality enterprises. This study employs grounded theory to investigate how entrepreneurs implement training. In-depth interviews collected rich data, processed through in-vivo coding in MAXQDA software. The analysis was deepened by memo writing and theoretical sampling, refining themes for theoretical development. This method highlights the iterative, explorative nature of understanding entrepreneurial training practices.

The primary objective of this study is to thoroughly analyse and comprehend the intricate role played by entrepreneurs in the implementation of training programs inside small and medium hospitality industry enterprises. Besides, to understand how entrepreneurs identify, plan, and carry out training efforts to address the changing demands of their workforce to be able to aid all the stakeholders that are involved in this sector to

understand the importance of a knowledgeable workforce to provide a seamless service to the customers.

The research question (RQ) for this study is: How do entrepreneurs identify and implement the training needs of a small business in the hospitality sector?

The question explores entrepreneurs' methods for identifying and applying training within small and medium hospitality businesses, focusing on enhancing performance and competitiveness. The study seeks to reveal strategies for effective skill development, aiming to improve service quality and competitive advantage.

For this research, there are three objectives:

1. To identify and critically evaluate a set of constructs relating to the implementation of training needs.
2. To map out the entrepreneur learning process in implementing training needs.
3. To provide entrepreneurs, policymakers, and academic researchers with an early entrepreneurial training conceptual model.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction to the Literature

In the hospitality industry, the approach to employee training significantly impacts business growth and workforce development. This review explores entrepreneurs' diverse philosophies toward on-the-job training and its effect on enhancing employee skills. It discusses the spectrum of entrepreneurial attitudes toward training, from active investment to scepticism, and how these viewpoints affect business strategies, employee engagement, and competitiveness in a fast-changing sector. The review aims to clarify the complexities of the entrepreneurial mindset concerning training.

2.2. The Entrepreneur's Philosophy of Training

An entrepreneurial philosophy about training plays a crucial role in the entrepreneur's mindset regarding training provision on the job. Stone (2012) states that entrepreneurs who have a disposition towards innovation and business growth will invest part of their capital in training their employees, and the training provided is closer to that provided by medium and large companies (Stone, 2012). Furthermore, constant changes in the hospitality sector are known for creating trends that influence travel choices, type of booking preferences, culinary tastes, and accommodation preferences (Bakic et al., 2010). Employees succeed because their employer provides constant training to enhance their performance and harness their potential (Sebola et al., 2019). Hyasat et al. (2022) support the idea that training employees on the job in small hospitality businesses nurtures skills and enhances competencies. It creates a valuable future for the employees' progression (Hyasat et al., 2022). Training

enables entrepreneurs to strengthen their workforce and plan for the future of their business, such as the internationalisation of the company, technology use, and to be able to counteract the fierce market competition that the hospitality industry offers (Núñez-Cacho Utrilla et al., 2023).

Aside from the positive aspects of a pro-training philosophy, literature shows that some entrepreneurs are reluctant and sceptical regarding training their employees. This is due to several issues. According to Stone (2012), small business owners perceive that the workforce is skilful enough to cope with the industry demands. This reasoning raises concerns that the entrepreneur may not be able to identify skills gaps and necessary training for their staff. Another factor contributing to training avoidance is fear experienced by entrepreneurs who believe they lack sufficient knowledge to conduct effective training. This will reveal the employer's shortcomings in training employees due to a lack of qualifications in the line of business (Stone, 2012). Additionally, factors such as elevated wages, taxation, and staff poaching are other elements that can hinder training, forcing the entrepreneur to put staff training aside (Stone, 2012).

Small business owners should recognise employees' significance in running an enterprise and pay attention to developing the employees' potential to implement good quality service, according to Hyasat et al. (2022). Moreover, when entrepreneurs consistently contribute to staff training, they are strategically enhancing their human capital to thrive in a competitive market.

2.3. Entrepreneurial Knowledge as a Catalyst for Training Employees

Metaphorically, all small businesses start their journey with the letter S, which signifies countless efforts, multiple struggles, and eventually success, according to Desouza and Awazu (2006). These three processes will lead to the letter M when the small enterprise becomes medium. If the success resumes, the small business will grow, clear goals and visions will materialise, and it will become a leader in their designated area of business (Desouza and Awazu, 2006). The triumph of small ventures is in the pillar of entrepreneurial knowledge that mirrors expertise, skills, and ideas for the future.

A business owner's sole motive is to succeed, which catalyses knowledge-seeking. Research indicates that successful entrepreneurs acquire knowledge in areas they are familiar with and areas lacking proficiency. Subsequently, their knowledge is converted into expertise to strengthen their specialisation (Omerzel and Antoncic, 2008). Entrepreneurial knowledge is a vital intangible asset for every business owner who owns and manages a small business, especially in times of uncertainty, such as inflation issues, and when business competitiveness is harsh internationally (Omerzel and Antoncic, 2008).

Knowledge has three phases. Firstly, knowledge is structured in the entrepreneur's mind and transmitted to the employees. In the second phase, the learning is converted into processes and policies to run the company. The third and final phase is the ability of the entrepreneur to establish contacts outside his business to gain knowledge from them; they are known as external sources (Wibowo and Grandhi, 2017). The latter statement is supported by Deseuza and Awazu (2006), who affirm that small businesses can obtain knowledge from each other and even from larger companies.

Hospitality industries, in their nature, rely a lot on consultants in this sector to obtain new knowledge and skills because they have networks with other small firms and a plethora of knowledge to transfer to employees (Schönherr et al., 2023). Apart from the owner's knowledge, the existing know-how should be transferred to the employees in various forms to enable a small business to function. It can be an appraisal, individual meetings, and on-the-job training in the form of an apprentice scheme. Newly developed knowledge should be implemented into practice to improve the outcome of the business (Desouza and Awazu, 2006). When learning is shifted through the process of socialisation by the entrepreneur, an internalisation of knowledge among existing staff and recruits is created. The socialisation process enables that information to be understood well by all employees and put into practice. Besides, this procedure will allow the entrepreneur to instill a knowledge-seeking employee mentality, enabling them to expand their enterprise with already trained personnel (Desouza and Awazu, 2006). Collective entrepreneurial knowledge has the power to create new products; hence, it contributes to creating an image and adds contributable value to the company.

Generally, small businesses are situated in a small, confined environment, and this ergonomic structural behaviour will bring the employees close to each other daily through verbal conversations. Work discussions are mostly not work-related, but this creates a healthy work environment, and knowledge absorption is done naturally, according to Desouza and Awazu (2006).

2.4. Skills and Knowledge Creation on The Job

Employability means the ability to obtain a job to produce an effective outcome from the activity being performed by harmonising a specific set of skills, as stated by Mc Guanagle and Zizka (2020). 21st-century skills refer to knowledge, competencies, work patterns, and the personality of every employee, which are critically important to an individual's success in today's world. These are also known as transferable and employability skills and are vital for unlocking the mind to be a creative, innovative, critical thinker, and problem solver (McGunagle and Zizka, 2020).

Skills serve as a gauge to measure the quality of pursuance of an employee on a specific task and the efficiency of

doing a job with technical and personality components (Patacsil and Tablatin, 2017). Skills are divided into two categories: hard skills and soft skills. Hard skills have a technical element in the production of work. Soft skills encompass the employees' attitudes and perspectives on the job, including effective communication within the team. According to Patacsil and Tablatin (2017), research shows that new employees, especially recent graduates, often struggle to implement soft skills on the job at the very early stages of their careers, such as problem-solving, communication, and negotiating skills. Their study revealed that communication skills are the most crucial proficiencies required for the job.

When new knowledge is created on the job, it indicates that new experiences are being developed and these need to be challenged by current learning processes (Schonheer et al., 2023). In fact, experiences in the workplace are the foundation of new knowledge content because experiences will create the trajectory for creating new content for the benefit of the employees (Schonheer et al., 2023). According to Schonheer et al. (2023), knowledge creation is a three-phase process; it is created, retained, and eventually transferred between departments within the firm for effective performance. When employees embrace new content, it can positively influence their thinking and even their behaviour (Dixit and Sinka, 2022). Acquiring new knowledge on the job enhances employees' confidence and allows them to utilise their full potential to progress within their field/within the company. When employees take advantage of new knowledge, they are given work freedom and less supervision is imposed on them (Schonheer et al., 2023).

2.5. Constructs of Training for Small Businesses

Training in a small business environment is successful when it incorporates three dominant factors: Training Design, Employee Traits, and Working Environment. Training design plays a pivotal role in the transfer of learning, where the content should be practical and relevant to the identified training needs. Nafukho et al. (2023) suggest that an ideal training design includes comprehensive elements such as the entrepreneur's knowledge, a well-structured curriculum and agenda, the harnessing of new knowledge, opportunities for applying this knowledge as skills, and an appraisal of the training's effectiveness. The activity transfer is a two-way flow, starting with content design, focusing on the relevance of training material, including mindset, materials, and practical application. Instructional design then follows, emphasising experiential learning or 'learning by doing.' This method allows for practice, error-based learning, and feedback within a real work scenario, allowing trainees to work alongside experienced employees. Error-based learning is particularly effective, encouraging trainees to make mistakes and analyse them in the context of their training. As outlined by Muzam et al. (2023), informal learning occurs through constructivism, where learners

construct knowledge through interaction with their environment, often unplanned and spontaneous.

Another method highlighted in the text is job rotation, as discussed by Núñez-Cacho Utrilla et al. (2023) and Al-Zoubi et al. (2022). This approach allows employees to move between different job functions, providing them with various experiences and continuous learning opportunities. Functional rotation involves transitioning within the same department, while cross-functional training involves moving to other departments. This practice enhances learning, increases motivation, and helps in career progression. Additionally, training can be provided by external coaches, focusing on a goal-oriented dialogue between the coach and trainees. Núñez-Cacho Utrilla et al. (2023) emphasise that coaching should align with the company's vision and goals, and it is also crucial for the coach to be aware of any conflicts within the organisation to reduce disputes and improve business performance.

The role of employee traits in training is significant, as highlighted by Sebola et al. (2019). There are two types of employees in the labour market: active and passive. Engaged employees are open to training and change, suggesting training needs themselves, while passive employees are more reluctant. A positive attitude towards training indicates a healthy relationship with the organisation, reflecting employees' satisfaction and willingness to go beyond their primary responsibilities.

Finally, the work environment plays a crucial role in training effectiveness. According to Schoner et al. (2022), the environment created within an enterprise, influenced by internal and external factors like clients vis-a-vis competitors, demands new knowledge and skills. A supportive workplace climate, coupled with support from entrepreneurs or supervisors, creates a conducive environment for training. Regular appraisals by the entrepreneur, as recommended by Sebola et al. (2017) and Hyasat et al. (2022), are essential in evaluating training effectiveness and aligning it with the company's goals, ultimately contributing to the overall success of the training program.

2.6. Induction Training

In the hospitality industry, initial training is crucial for all recruits, including management positions, back-of-house, and frontline staff. Induction training is the pinnacle for employees, allowing them to establish a mutual relationship between the business and the employer (Andrews and Turner, 2017). Initial training is described by Andrews and Turner (2017) as an activity that is being held in different departments of the firm, and its primary purpose is to help new employees familiarise themselves with other colleagues, safety procedures, policies, rules, and regulations of that are required from all staff to be adhered to. Another crucial point suggested by Andrews and Turner (2017) is that during the initial training phase, the employees should have a designated point of reference. This could be the employer directly or another

individual so they can seek assistance if they encounter challenges with tasks assigned to them.

The initial training is also described as the socialisation process. When implemented correctly, it will instigate the new employees to engage more with the company's mentality and be the catalyst for staff to push that extra mile to give their utmost to the company. Besides, it is a tool that can help new personnel to counter their emotions because sometimes it is not easy to settle for a new job (Andrews and Turner, 2017).

There is unanimity that the initial training will enact a bond between the employer and the employee, which can result in employee loyalty and contribution towards the business entity (Andrews and Turner, 2017). Induction training should be well planned and not underrated because the desired bond would not materialise. The first day of the initial training is a dual-mode perspective because the employer and the employees have assumptions created during the initial phase of the recruitment process (Andrews and Turner, 2017). It is advised that during the selection process of employees, things are said honestly from both sides to avoid disappointments during the induction process.

3. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research is instrumental in unveiling both overt and covert patterns within data. For this study, the researcher adopted the Grounded Theory methodology due to its emphasis on emergent concepts throughout the research trajectory. Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) argue that this methodology fosters a deeper, iterative engagement with data, facilitating continuous construction and connection of information. In a similar vein, Lowrie et al. (2021) concur, highlighting the profound depth of data exploration it offers. Furthermore, Constructivist Grounded Theory permits the development of theory grounded in core data concepts, with the researcher's interpretations playing a pivotal role in shaping the eventual theoretical narrative.

The researcher in this study chose qualitative research for its capability to uncover the hidden aspects within data, adopting a constructivist approach as outlined by Charmaz and Thornberg (2021). This approach is based on the constructivist belief, as Bell and Liu (2019) described, that knowledge is progressively constructed through individual experiences, not merely discovered. Chandra and Shang (2017) further emphasise that constructivism considers personal life experiences foundational in shaping social realities. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), constructivism views individuals as active interpreters of their environments, creating complex meanings from their experiences. Therefore, this study's methodology focused on capturing the participant's voices through open-ended questions, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives. The researcher maintained an external, impartial stance, as noted by Chereni (2014), to establish an unbiased rapport with participants.

The one-to-one interview method was chosen as a method to collect data. As Foley et al., (2021) note, research questions in this methodology are dynamic, evolving as new codes from the data emerge. In this research, interviews were audio-recorded, a strategy endorsed by Charmaz (2006) and Birks and Mills (2015), to ensure accurate transcription while maintaining eye contact with participants for a more engaged interaction.

The initial interview, which was unstructured and based on a convenience sample, reflected the researcher's initial unfamiliarity with the topic. This approach is in line with Foley et al. (2021). Subsequent interviews were more structured, drawing on in-depth qualitative methods and purposive sampling, as Rubin and Rubin (2012) described. This approach allowed the research to evolve, with the interviews becoming more detailed and focused, guiding the development of a theoretical framework.

After the second interview, purposeful sampling was used to select the participants: three Maltese restaurant owners and a boutique hotel owner. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of their perspectives on training implementation. Data was gathered through evolving one-to-one interviews, starting with an unstructured format and moving to more detailed, open-ended discussions. Interviewees consented to audio recording, ensuring privacy, and securely storing the data.

The interview transcripts were analysed using in-vivo coding with MAXQDA software, capturing the participants' exact words and meanings. This two-phase coding process was pivotal for developing the analytical framework for this research and emergent theory. Additionally, memos written post-interviews and coding sessions provided a valuable resource for reflecting on participant experiences and aiding in theory construction. Code Proximity was used using MAXQDA to explore the proximity or closeness of codes visually and analytically. Code proximity can be understood as the frequency of co-occurrence: this refers to how often two or more codes appear together in the same or adjacent data segments. A high frequency of co-occurrence can indicate a strong relationship between the concepts represented by these codes.

As the research progressed, theoretical sampling was employed to compare data and refine codes and categories, with additional participants being brought in to enrich the data and analysis. Each participant's agreement to join the study was voluntary, and anonymity was endorsed during the research process. The participants were given a nom de plume: Paul, Brian, John, and Emma.

4. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

The researcher adopted the conditional matrix process proposed by Strauss and Corbin (2015) to structure the category schema, utilising MAXQDA's creative coding. The primary core category was labelled "Training Strategies by

the Entrepreneur", further divided into "context", "actions", and "consequences", along with their related subcodes. Context, as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (2015), reflects the interpretations, meanings, and justifications individuals ascribe to events and, subsequently, how they react. This framework places significant emphasis on the interplay between action and reaction, underscoring the importance of understanding context in data analysis, especially for theory construction. Furthermore, it is essential to recognise the link between actions and their resulting effects, especially for novice researchers. The paradigm model allows researchers to centralise action-interaction in their analysis and understand its relation to other identified concepts (Strauss and Corbin, 2015)

4.2. Research Findings – Context

Entrepreneurial Context

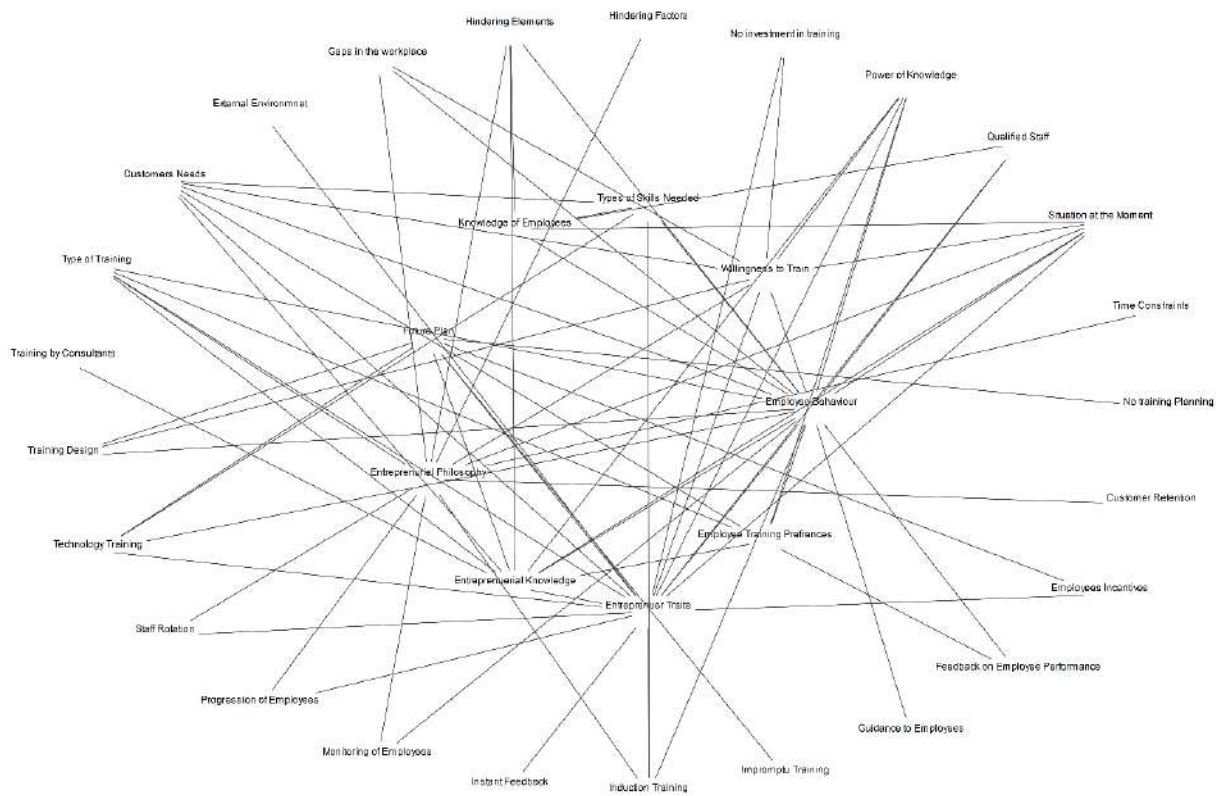
The unanimous sentiment among participants is the paramount importance of on-the-job training. This echoes the findings by Stone (2012) and Hyasat et al. (2022), emphasising the role of training in enhancing employee competencies. Training is not only an investment (Hyasat et al., 2022) but a tool for instilling responsibility and work culture. This approach ensures that employees understand and align with business goals.

Entrepreneurs need to tailor training to individual employee experience levels, recognising that experienced staff might view certain training as redundant (Andrews and Turner, 2017). Well-planned training, as underscored by Nafhuko et al. (2023), aligned with an entrepreneurial training philosophy, prepares businesses for long-term success (Núñez-Cacho Utrilla et al., 2023). Participants' commitment to continuous learning and enhancement of their specialisation is evident from their diverse efforts, from studying at the Institute of Tourism Studies to seeking inspiration globally.

The value of collective entrepreneurial knowledge is seen in the context of consistent product quality and customer loyalty (Desouza and Awzu, 2006). The entrepreneur's proactive stance in training, highlighted by leading by example, creates a conducive learning environment, as noted by Nafhuko et al. (2017), and positively impacts employee performance (Sebola et al., 2019). This commitment extends to training even those without formal qualifications, underscoring the entrepreneur's role in fostering a culture of lifelong learning (Mc Guanagle and Zika, 2019).

An innovative drive, suggested by Stone (2012), enables entrepreneurs to continually refine and profit from their offerings. The context code proximity (Figure 1) illustrates the intricate connection between entrepreneurial philosophy, knowledge acquisition, and character traits. A training-centric entrepreneurial philosophy propels the entrepreneur to amass knowledge that is beneficial for employee training.

Figure 1. | Context Code Proximity



Employee Behaviour: A Training Identification Process

Behaviour, encompassing confidence, performance, and employee communication, is a determinant of training needs. Paul and Emma employ observation techniques to gauge employee behaviours and identify training needs. Specifically, Emma leverages her experienced staff as internal trainers, enhancing the training process for new hires (Núñez-Cacho Utrilla et al., 2023). This approach aligns with the recommendations of Andrews and Turner (2017) and Zhao et al. (2023), who stress the importance of assessing employee behaviour to pinpoint training requirements. Conversely, Brian's reliance on personal relationships might hinder an objective evaluation of his employees' behaviour, while John views behaviour as a distinct aspect from training needs, attributing it to individual personalities.

Types of skills needed depend on the knowledge of employees

Skills should function in harmony and are equally crucial, as emphasised by both the participants and McGuangle and Zizka (2020). The entrepreneurs associate necessary skills with specialised knowledge and further highlight customer service, creativity, innovation, and digital competencies. Brian emphasises the need for tailored training based on existing employee knowledge, aligning with Patacsil and Tablatin's (2017) assertion of continuous skill refinement. Emma believes in empowering employees to express their personalities within defined boundaries, fostering an environment that encourages

the assessment of their expertise. This is in agreement with previous research on knowledge evaluation of Mohija (2023). This interrelation of knowledge and skills, which guides entrepreneurs in discerning the requisite skill enhancement for efficacy, becomes evident when analysing the code proximity model (Figure 1)

4.3. Research Findings- Actions

Training Design: The Pinnacle of Effective Training

Upon identifying employees' skills gaps and evaluating their existing knowledge, the focus shifts to training design. Paul and Emma prioritise structured training planning. Contrarily, John addresses immediate skill deficits, while Brian does not formalise training. Paul emphasises the significance of aligning training content with identified skill gaps for optimal efficacy, echoing the viewpoint articulated by Nafhuko et al. (2023) regarding the crucial role of training design. Emma utilises a bespoke training analysis tool, aggregating department head observations, guest feedback, and staff training requests. This underscores the internal environment's role in driving employees to actively seek training (Sebola et al., 2019).

Type of Training performed: Investment in training, Monitoring and Progression of Employees

Participants showcased varied approaches in implementing their instructional design transfer modes, as elucidated by Nafhuko et al. (2023). Paul and Emma are proponents of the "learning-by-doing" approach, which is characterised by its emphasis on tangible, hands-on

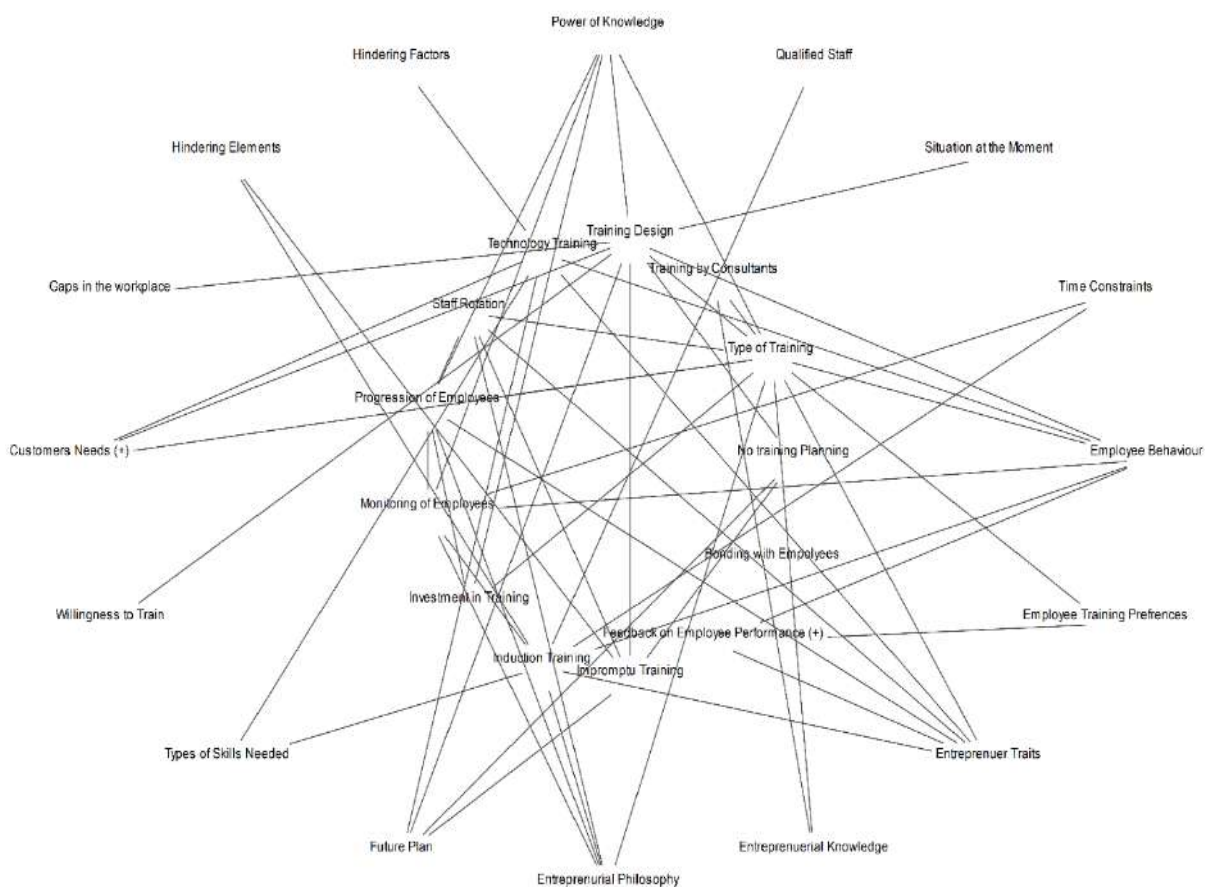
experiences. This method is rooted in the belief that many in the hospitality sector prefer direct engagement and benefit from experiential learning, encompassing essential elements of collaboration, interaction, and mutual knowledge sharing.

Conversely, John employs the error-based learning methodology. He believes that by allowing employees to make and rectify mistakes, they gain a deeper understanding of their tasks. Nafhuko et al. (2023) have recognised the potency of this method, asserting its efficacy in fostering lasting learning outcomes. Post-training observations reveal substantial enhancements in the way employees conduct their roles. These improvements, indicating the importance of ongoing training, are in line with the findings of both Hysat et al. (2022) and Sebola et al. (2019). Diversifying her approach, Emma taps into external resources. She avails of the training incentives provided by the Maltese Government,

a program detailed by Jobsplus (2020). However, it is worth noting that awareness and utilisation of the 'Invest in Skills' scheme among other participants remain limited.

An essential facet of the training process is monitoring, which Paul particularly emphasises. He believes in actively overseeing employees during and post-training sessions to assess the effectiveness of the instructional methods. Baran and Woznyj (2021) have advocated for this approach, emphasising its value in refining training processes. The actions code proximity (Figure 2) highlights an evident triangulation among the kind of training administered, the investment channelled into training, and the consistent monitoring of employees. Collectively, these elements contribute significantly to the progressive development of employees.

Figure 2. | Actions Code Proximity



Induction Training and Bonding with Employees

The consensus among participants was that induction training primarily serves business interests. A rapid assimilation of new employees into the company's operations correlates with superior customer service. Participants differed in their induction methodologies: Paul Favours pairing newcomers with experienced staff, facilitating a socialisation phase, and providing a

reference point for task-related queries (Andrews and Turner, 2017). Brian and John, in contrast, employ a structured induction approach that is completed within a week. Emma's approach is intimate, combining personal instruction on theoretical aspects and relying on internal trainers for practical training.

These induction modalities, despite their differences, are consistent and effective, reaffirming the importance of

well-designed induction processes (Andrews and Turner, 2017). A pivotal outcome of the induction phase, as the literature suggests, is the establishment of rapport between the employer and new hires (Andrews and Turner, 2017). However, participant perspectives varied: Paul and John view induction as an extended interview, a method to discern the veracity of new employees' professed skills, noting that interviews can sometimes be misleading. Brian sees induction as a partial bonding process but prefers informal out-of-work settings for deeper bonding. Emma prioritises a strong bond from the onset, emphasising trust and comfort in the workplace.

The code proximity analysis emphasises the intertwined nature of induction training and bonding, suggesting the importance of fostering a trusting dyad between employer and employee for effective guidance.

Staff Rotation as a Learning Curve and Impromptu Training

Participants recognised staff rotation as an avenue to foster versatile, multitasking employees, reducing an organisation's reliance on specific employee roles. While most participants embraced the functional rotation method (Al-Zoubi et al., 2022), Emma favoured cross-functional training, emphasising holistic operational training across all departments. The nature of the business environment influences the viability of rotation methods; boutique hotels, for instance, offer diverse departments conducive to cross-functional training. Regular staff rotation not only ensures operational flexibility, facilitating employee replacements during absences, but also offers career progression opportunities (Zoubi et al., 2022; Olusanya, 2021).

Additionally, John and Emma occasionally implement impromptu training during lulls or high-demand periods, respectively, aligning with Muzam et al. (2023) observations. The code proximity analysis underscores a strong correlation between staff rotation and employee career progression, suggesting it is a pivotal tool for staff development. However, impromptu training, given its sporadic nature and potential lack of structure, appears less influential in fostering employee progression among the study's participants.

Feedback on Employee Performance after Training

In contrast to the recommendations of Sebola et al. (2017) and Hysat et al. (2022), advocating for post-training formal appraisals, the interviewees did not adopt this approach. Instead, they favoured direct verbal feedback during and after training. Paul and Brian abstain from appraisals, citing time limitations and their restaurant's bustling nature. John and Emma prefer soliciting employee feedback rather than traditional appraisals, viewing it as a valuable learning avenue for entrepreneurs to optimise training effectiveness.

4.4. Research Findings- Consequences

Knowledge at work and how it shapes the workplace

Knowledge can influence attitudes and behaviour in the workplace, a notion supported by both Paul and Schonheer et al. (2023). An entrepreneur's continuous learning journey, as noted by Paul, is pivotal to business success, echoing Omerzel and Antoncic's (2008) stance on the entrepreneur's role as a perpetual knowledge seeker. Furthermore, as employees transition between jobs, they carry and disseminate their expertise, fostering a knowledge-sharing community within the hospitality sector (Schonheer et al., 2023). Both John and Emma emphasise the importance of staying abreast with industry trends and innovations, linking it to business success as well as guest experience enhancement. This perspective aligns with Bakic et al. (2010). Moreover, Emma's efforts to foster connections with other boutique hotels in Malta represent an advanced entrepreneurial stage where external collaborations augment knowledge acquisition, as outlined by Wibowo and Grandhi (2017).

Training efficacy in harnessing customers' needs

Well-trained employees are pivotal for enhancing customer service, leading to repeat clientele, a sentiment supported by all participants and echoed by Mc Guangale and Zizka (2019). Paul noted the value of feedback from loyal customers, while John emphasised the adaptability required in the hospitality sector to accommodate evolving eating trends, a notion aligned with Bakic et al. (2010). John's strategy of periodic menu changes exemplifies responsiveness to customers' needs and economic viability. He also emphasised the invaluable insights entrepreneurs can glean from customer requests, suggesting that training should be tailored accordingly. Emma underscored the significance of guest feedback, emphasising the contemporary relevance of online platforms like Trip Advisor and Bookings.com for insights. The consequences proximity chart (Figure 3) underscores the symbiotic relationship between the power of knowledge and customer needs, implying that effective training should align with current trends and customer preferences.

Harnessing the External Environment: Reshaping Internal Training Strategies

Paul, John, and Emma recognise the pivotal role of the external environment, particularly customer feedback, in dictating how entrepreneurs should tailor or modify their training methods, as substantiated by Schoner et al. (2022). Paul perceives the external environment as a reflection of present necessities, guiding adjustments in training areas to address potential

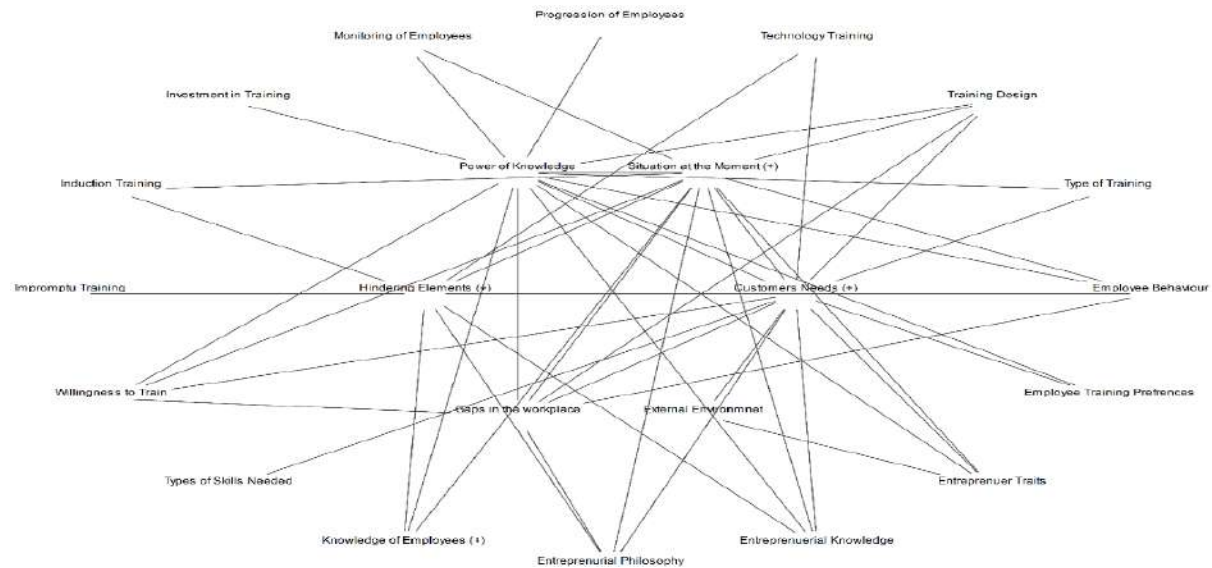
deficiencies. Similarly, John values the insights gleaned from customer feedback post-dining, using it to finetune employee training. Emma adopts a unique approach; she observes competitors who have set higher benchmarks, using them as a blueprint to enhance her own standards, aiming not just to match but exceed them, consistent with findings by Schoner et al. (2022). In contrast, Brian

remains steadfast in his philosophy, prioritising his distinct restaurant style over external influences.

The collective sentiments of the three participants underscore the dominant influence of the external environment in shaping business strategies and training, as highlighted by Schoner et al. (2022). For Paul and John, it's the feedback from customers that defines this external

environment, allowing businesses to pinpoint areas of improvement. The "consequences proximity chart" delineates the intertwined relationship among the power of knowledge, the specific needs of customers, and external environmental factors. Through comprehensive analysis of these intertwined elements, businesses can cultivate new knowledge, which can then be actualised into impactful training strategies.

Figure 3. | Consequences Code Proximity



5. DISCUSSION

The researcher set out to investigate the nuances of how the entrepreneur should implement training. The purpose of the research question was to examine how business owners determine their own training needs. The previous chapter reported the data collection and analysis results using grounded theory. The research leaves the description world and enters the realm of interpretation along with insight generation when the discussion phase begins.

The findings chapter yielded seven key findings that the entrepreneur should consider before conducting training:

1. The entrepreneur should have a pro-training philosophy knowledge and be willing to train his employees.
2. Training is an investment; it should be monitored and would lead to the progression of employees.
3. Employees' skills and knowledge should be considered before planning training.
4. Induction training will lead to bonding and building trust with employees.
5. Staff rotation leads to a progression of employees.
6. Customers' needs and the external environment create new knowledge.
7. The entrepreneur should monitor the actual situation of his employees to identify training needs.

5.1. The Research Question Analysis

RQ: How do entrepreneurs identify and implement the training needs of a small business in the hospitality sector?

The study underscores the pivotal role of customer feedback in discerning training needs to enhance their overall experience, as emphasised by McGuangal and Zizka (2019). Unified in their opinion, participants recognised the merit of such feedback as a key resource for refining training. Drawing comparisons between this feedback and the extant skills of employees, as delineated by Mohija (2023), facilitates the development of targeted training modules. In doing so, it's imperative that training aligns with skill enhancement requirements, a sentiment echoed by Nafhuko et al. (2023). The answer to the RQ: The customer's needs, through feedback, will enable the entrepreneur to assess the current skills of his employees and identify existing gaps to be implemented in the training design content.

Objective 1: To identify and critically evaluate a set of constructs relating to the implementation of training needs by the entrepreneur in a small business organisation in the hospitality business.

Two sets of interviews that had a number of things in common were compared using Max Maps Two case model (Figure 4). Set 5 includes John and Brian's interviews and set 2 comprises Emma and John interviews.

The two-case model relates to the research question and gives evidence of five essential constructs to be considered by the entrepreneur when training is required. The five constructs are:

1. Employee Behaviour,
2. Type of Skills,
3. Staff Rotation,
4. Feedback on employee performance,
5. Customers' needs.

Employee behaviour and skills work in syntony and are mirrored in their performance (Andrews and Turner 2017). The entrepreneur should be vigilant about the

employee's behaviour to determine which skills should be enforced. Staff rotation is a handy tool to train employees to multitask internally and not depend on specific employees (Al-Zoubi et al., 2022; Olusanya, 2021). If training is held seriously, feedback is helpful in the progression trajectory of employees because it will guide them on their performance on what went right or wrong and what should be strengthened (Nafhuko et al., 2023). This research showed that customers' need is the pillar of the training process. The customers want to savour an experience, and this experience is a tangible process initiated by the employees' skills.

Figure 4. | Two-Cases Model Interview Sets

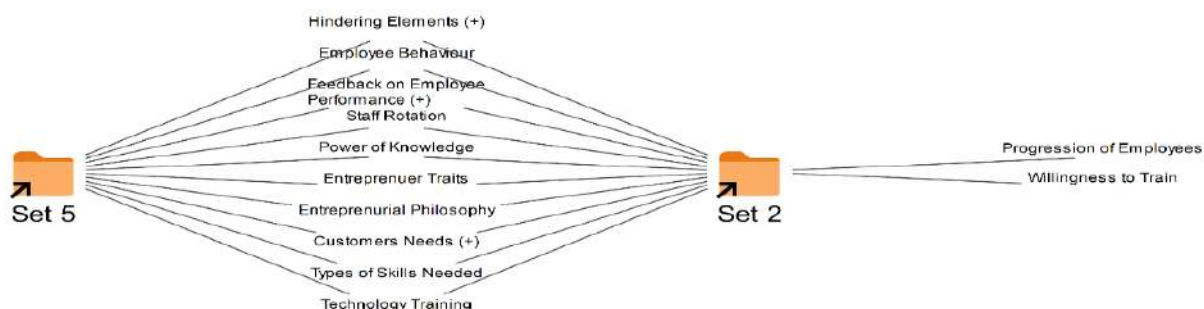


Figure 5. | Entrepreneur Learning Process Map

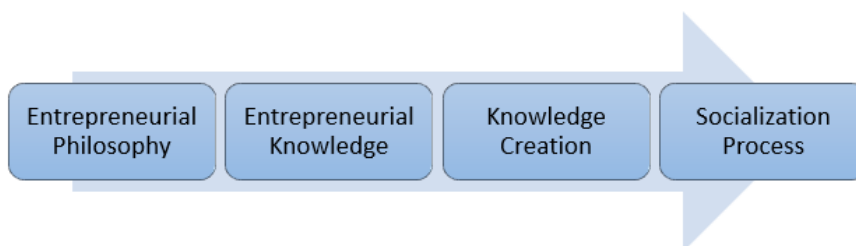


Figure 6. | Conceptual Model



Objective 2: To map out the entrepreneur learning process in implementing training needs relating to small businesses in the hospitality sector.

The learning process (Figure 5) is initiated when the philosophy of training is a frame of mind in the collective perspective of the entrepreneur to adhere to innovation and business growth (Stone, 2012). The entrepreneur

should continue to train himself by using various strategies such as researching current trends, experiencing other establishments in the same line of business, and updating on what is happening in the external environment (Bakic et al., 2010). These approaches will help the entrepreneur get inspiration and harness existing knowledge (Omerzel and Antoncic,

2008). The socialisation process through various forms of training will enable the entrepreneur to disseminate the new knowledge and determine if the training strategy is effective (Desouza and Awazu, 2006).

Objective 3: To provide entrepreneurs, policymakers, and academic researchers with an early conceptual model that can provide them with guidance on how to implement the training needs of small businesses.

A conceptual model is the researcher's belief of how the development of a phenomenon in this study has emerged. The researcher describes how the research question was prospected (Adom et al., 2018). The theoretical framework supporting the research question is represented visually by the conceptual model in Figure 6.

6. CONCLUSION

The study indicates that business owners can effectively identify training needs by juxtaposing customer feedback against staff competencies. Ensuring this alignment is pivotal for curating training content aimed at bridging identified gaps and fostering essential skills. The code proximity framework underscores the intertwined nature of employee capabilities, training design, and customer requirements.

This study was based on four interviews, and theoretical sensitivity was not reached; hence, theory development was not reached. The outcomes of this study can help future research. Since this study was concerned with the entrepreneur's methods of identifying training methods, it is good to understand the employees' views about training, and the results can be compared to determine valuable training needs.

The researcher's recommendations are:

- Enhanced Employee Feedback: Feedback should be continuous and vigorous. Small businesses should create mechanisms where employees can frequently voice how training was performed, and they can suggest improvements.
- Continuous Learning Culture: The entrepreneur should implement from the beginning of the business operation a learning culture to be a catalyst to stimulate employees to learn and enhance their skills and knowledge. Learning culture should be the norm of the day.
- Invest in Employee Development: Training is an investment; it should not be considered a cost burden. Training would drive the employees to be satisfied on the job and help in the retention of employees.
- Positioning with Organisational Goals: Training must reflect the strategies and goals of the enterprise. Training must be assessed if it is granted to fulfil the company's business objectives.

This research underscores the pivotal role of planned entrepreneur-led training in small hospitality enterprises, advocating for a continuous learning culture and strategic employee development aligned with organisational goals. It emphasises entrepreneur engagement and customer feedback as essential elements in refining training strategies. The findings, contributing to the discourse on effective small business training methods, highlight the synergy between employee skills enhancement and customer satisfaction, offering practical insights for small business owners in the hospitality sector to adapt and thrive (Stone, 2012; Hyasat et al., 2022; Omerzel and Antonicic, 2008).

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