

# Workplace learning and organisational performance in the hospitality industry

Workplace  
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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The hospitality industry creates a distinctive context in which learning takes place. The industry's international perspective and large globalisation play an important role in learning, as well as the operational and structural features that give meaning to learning and development in the hospitality industry. This explorative research therefore studies the relation between workplace learning and organisational performance in the Dutch hospitality industry.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The qualitative research is done through 15 in-depth interviews with general managers and HR managers of Dutch hotels with three or more stars and at least ten employees.

**Findings** – It can be concluded that there is a relation between workplace learning and organisational performance in the hospitality industry, as the participants in this research and the literature both mention workplace learning enhances organisational performance.

**Originality/value** – Little research has been done on learning and organisational performance specifically, in the (Western) hospitality industry. This research therefore focusses on HRD and studies the influence of workplace learning on organisational performance in the Dutch hospitality industry.

**Keywords** Learning climate, Workplace learning, Organisational performance, Innovative work behaviour, Hospitality industry

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Organisational boundaries are softening and extending, and traditional jobs are changing as work becomes more focussed on expertise, addressing specific problems and challenges based on projects, within or outside the organisation (Jennings, 2015). To succeed and survive in the 21st century, organisations need to develop the internal capacity to continuously undergo new skill cycles to maintain their competitiveness (Gottfredson, 2014). Continuous learning and performance improvement therefore lie at the heart of any business (Hart, 2015).



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Most organisations base this in a human resource development (HRD) department. The goal of HRD is to keep the human capital of the organisation up to date and future proof as [Van Loo and De Grip \(2003\)](#) define it. HRD focusses on facilitating a good learning climate and a mix of formal and informal learning in the organisation. However, as [Arets \*et al.\* \(2015\)](#) argue, HRD is stuck in the “training bubble”, the belief that formal training will cure all ailments. They argue that the importance of informal learning processes, such as experimentation, learning through reflection or from colleagues, is often not seen, or ignored by the HRD department. However, daily work should facilitate the process of knowledge productivity and learning; work becomes learning and vice versa; they are inseparable ([Arets and Heijnen, 2011](#); [Cornelissen and Soons, 2012](#); [Jennings, 2015](#); [Kessels and Keursten, 2001](#); [Rabin, 2014](#)).

According to [MGI \(2017\)](#), the hospitality industry has the largest automation potential of all industries: 73% of tasks can be taken over by technology. Also, [WEF \(2017\)](#) acknowledges that hospitality is highly susceptible to technology, which is already gaining ground in the industry ([Alexis, 2017](#)). This means tasks in the hospitality industry will change and different tasks will become more important. As employees’ knowledge and skills are the most important assets in service organisations, especially in the hospitality industry, improvement of human capital has become a priority ([Nieves \*et al.\*, 2014](#)). The success of hospitality businesses depends on the quality of its human capital, the education and development of skills that drive productivity and of labour and with that the organisation’s earnings ([Davidson \*et al.\*, 2010](#); [Marginson, 2017](#)).

[Li \*et al.\* \(2013\)](#) argue that the hospitality industry creates a distinctive context in which learning takes place. The skill deficiency and high turnover in staff influence the performance of the organisation ([Lashley and Rowson, 2010](#); [Li \*et al.\*, 2013](#)). The pressure peaks and different working environment demand, however, that hospitality professionals prioritise their work activities in different ways ([Bernsen \*et al.\*, 2009](#); [Li \*et al.\*, 2013](#)). The work is characterised with high-pressure peaks and plateaus. Nonetheless, the hospitality industry shows a lack of knowledge about skills development for professionals and HRD ([Li \*et al.\*, 2013](#); [Sainaghi and Baggio, 2014](#)). Little research has been done on learning and organisational performance specifically, in the (Western) hospitality industry.

This research therefore focusses on HRD and studies the influence of workplace learning on organisational performance in the Dutch hospitality industry.

The foregoing results in the following main question:

What is the relation between workplace learning and organisational performance in the hospitality industry in the Netherlands?

## Literature review

As the hospitality industry keeps growing, even faster than the global economy, it has an opportunity to play a key role in creating high-quality employment opportunities ([WEF, 2017](#)). However, there is also a cloud of concern about HRM issues in the industry ([Solnet \*et al.\*, 2015](#)), for example, the changes caused by automation as employees need to be able to work with technology and focus on the skills technology struggles with the most ([Stoffers, 2016](#); [WEF, 2017](#)). The skill deficiency in the hospitality industry affects its performance, and the high turnover in staff creates a distinctive context ([Lashley and Rowson, 2010](#); [Li \*et al.\*, 2013](#)). [Davidson \*et al.\* \(2010\)](#) also noted in their research that high staff turnover creates increasing pressure on training requirements to maintain service levels in the hospitality industry.

Research shows the positive effects of investment in HRD and an organisational learning climate on employee capability and employability and organisational performance ([Huselid, 2013](#); [Kusluvan \*et al.\*, 2010](#); [Marginson, 2017](#); [Nolan and Caravan, 2016](#); [Rebelo and Gomes, 2017](#); [Van Der Heijden \*et al.\*, 2009](#)). [Celemin-Pedroche \*et al.\* \(2017\)](#) found a positive relationship

between learning and organisational performance in the Spanish hotel industry. The literature highlights a positive relation between workplace learning and benefits for the organisation. However, as Nolan (2002) mentions, many employers in the hotel industry remain unconvinced of the benefits of workplace learning, and according to Baum (2002), the hospitality industry is among the industries spending the least on performance improvement and HRD.

### Learning

Firstly, learning and different forms of learning should be defined. The literature provides a variety of definitions of learning. Eraut (2000, p. 114) gives the most simple and basic definition of learning: *“Learning is defined as the process whereby knowledge is acquired”*. However, learning is referred to as a complex process. A single definition of learning does not exist, but the different definitions have many elements in common. Shuell (1986) incorporates these main ideas: *“Learning is an enduring change in behaviour, or in the capacity to behave in a given fashion, which results from practice or other forms of experience”* (p. 2). As Ropes (2011) indicates, learning can be seen as a process and an outcome. Combining the definition of Eraut (2000), the process, and Shuell (1986), the outcome, learning can be defined as the process of acquiring knowledge, leading to changes in thinking or behaviour.

On the topic of learning in the workplace, Kessels and Keursten (2001) discuss a learning landscape, which they define as a transformation of the daily workplace into an environment where learning and working happen simultaneously; a rich and varied environment which stimulates and supports the much-needed learning process. Based on a literature review, Nikolova *et al.* (2014b, p. 259) define a learning climate as *“employees’ perceptions of organisational policies, and practices aimed at facilitating, rewarding and supporting employee learning behaviour”*. Nikolova *et al.* (2014b) measure the learning climate in organisations using three dimensions: facilitation, appreciation and error avoidance. The definition of Nikolova *et al.* (2014b) of the learning climate involves the formal and informal learning possibilities in the workplace and the stimulation of formal and informal learning and is therefore more inclusive than the definition of Kessels and Keursten (2001), who focus on informal learning.

Many different forms of learning are discussed in the literature and can be divided into the two basic forms of learning: formal and informal learning (Van Der Heijden *et al.*, 2009).

Formal learning happens at a regulated time, in a regulated place and with regulated content, is typically curriculum-based and includes some form of evaluation or certification at the end (Brown and Duguid, 1991). Formal learning is an event, the learning processes are organised with a certain goal (Vermeulen and Versloot, 2016). De Laat (2012, p. 9) summarises formal learning in one sentence: *“Formal learning refers to planned education and training initiatives provided by experts, resulting in a diploma or certificate.”*

Eraut (2000) describes informal learning as a category to describe any kind of learning not taking place within a formally organised programme or event. As Arets (2009) says, it is not easy to describe informal learning. Literature has made many attempts, but there is no consensus on how informal learning is defined. However, there is conformity in the characteristics of informal learning, and they are described as follows by Hager and Halliday (2009):

- (1) Informal learning is indefinite, there is no definite learning goal.
- (2) Informal learning aims to achieve external and internal benefits. Informal learning offers more opportunities for internal benefits, such as developing personal enhancements, values and social skills.
- (3) Informal learning is opportunistic and does not happen at a specific time or place. Learning happens at the moment it is needed (personally or professionally).

- (4) Informal learning is a constant process of individuals and groups, within and outside of the organisation.
- (5) To summarise, informal learning is an opportunistic learning process independent of a specific time or place, which happens individually and in groups, with internal and external benefits.

The ratio of formal and informal learning varies with context. However, organisations spend most of their money and time on formal learning and very little on informal learning (Arets and Heijnen, 2011). The effect of formal learning on employee performance is sometimes dubitable, due to a lack of transfer of the gained knowledge to the workplace (Van Der Heijden *et al.*, 2009). The main advantage of formal learning is that it is the easiest to account for, it is quantifiable and the results can easily be evaluated with the participants. Informal learning, on the other hand, is difficult to quantify and manage, and much informal learning happens unnoticed (De Laat, 2012; Jennings, 2015; Vermeulen and Versloot, 2016). In this research, learning in the organisation is studied by informal learning, formal learning and the learning climate in the organisation. This results in the following research question:

*RQ1.* What are effective ways of workplace learning in the hospitality industry?

#### *Organisational performance*

The organisation can be managed effectively towards performance only through a holistic view on performance (Rummler and Brache, 2013). Measurements of organisational performance should also include a holistic view of the organisation. However, as research of Prieto and Revilla (2006) shows, learning shows a positive influence on non-financial performance of organisations. For example, growth and innovation can also be a measurable outcome of organisational learning (Janssen, 2000, 2001; Noe *et al.*, 2014). Therefore this research will focus on the influence of learning on subjective factors of organisational performance and innovation.

One of the most used subjective theories of organisational performance is the theory of Delaney and Huselid (1996), which comprises two variables and measures the organisation's perceived performance (Stoffers *et al.*, 2014). Delaney and Huselid (1996) study subjective organisational performance using two variables. The first variable assesses respondents' perceptions of their firm's performance over the past three years relative to that of similar organisations (perceived organisational performance). The second variable concerns respondents' perceptions of their firm's performance over the past three years relative to product market competitors (perceived market performance). In addition to the objective organisational performance, it gives the organisation an indication of the image the various stakeholders have of its performance. However, in a world and industry that is highly susceptible to technology and change (MGI, 2017; WEF, 2017), organisational performance is also highly dependent on innovation and growth, especially in the medium and long term (Campo *et al.*, 2014).

Innovation has emerged as an essential component for organisational success and gaining competitive advantage (Aslander and Witteveen, 2015; Orfila-Sintes and Mattsson, 2009; Zopiatis and Theocharous, 2018). According to Zopiatis and Theocharous (2018, p. 15) "*the hospitality industry must strive to attract and retain creative risk-takers who are willing and able to challenge long-standing and deeply rooted paradigms, mentalities, and norms which have guided the industry's operations for the past 50 years*". Because in the hospitality industry employees are crucial for the creation of a positive guest experience, there has been a call for more research on innovation in the industry (Slåtten and Mehmetoglu, 2011). Innovation, and with it the innovative work behaviour of employees in organisations, becomes an important part of organisational performance especially in the medium and long term (Campo *et al.*, 2014).

Innovative work behaviour is an indispensable factor in achieving improved performance and competitiveness for organisations (Stoffers and Van der Heijden, 2018). Innovative work behaviour is defined by Janssen (2000, p. 288) as *“the intentional creation, introduction and application of new ideas within a work role, group or organisation, in order to promote role performance, the group, or the organisation”*. Janssen developed a scale to study three phases of innovative work behaviour: idea generation, idea promotion and organisational support and idea realisation based on Kanter’s (1988) stages of innovation.

The literature highlights a positive relation between workplace learning and benefits for the organisation. However, as Nolan (2002) mentions, many employers in the hotel industry remain unconvinced of the benefits of workplace learning, and according to Baum (2002), the hospitality industry is among the industries spending the least on performance improvement and HRD. Measurements of organisational performance should include a holistic view of the organisation. Few studies, however, use both objective and subjective measures as described earlier (Nolan and Caravan, 2016). This results in the following research questions:

RQ2. What is the relationship between workplace learning and subjective organisational performance in the hospitality industry in the Netherlands?

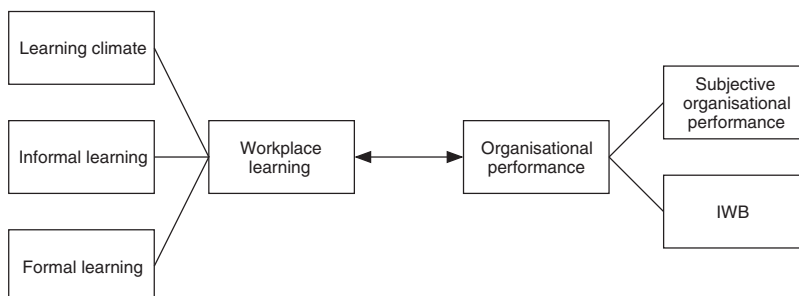
RQ3. What is the relationship between workplace learning and innovative work behaviour in the hospitality industry in the Netherlands?

This literature review results in a conceptual model providing a literature overview and the connections between the variables, aimed at answering the main research question (see Figure 1).

## Methodology

The qualitative research in this study was used to fill in the theoretical gap of the relation between workplace learning and organisational performance in the Dutch hospitality industry, to be able to theorise and research the variables in the right context and to continue to build on the available theory in the context of the hospitality industry.

This explorative qualitative research was done by semi-structured, in-depth, expert interviews with general managers or HRM/HRD managers employed by Dutch hotels (ten or more employees). The interviews were done on location of the experts or by telephone. The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Descriptive coding was used to label and organise data that pertained to the variables in the study. After that, mapping was conducted to determine how the variables interrelate. During pattern coding and mapping, memos were used to capture spontaneous ideas and thoughts about data (Miles and Huberman, 1994).



**Figure 1.**  
Conceptual model

In this study, the topic list of the in-depth interviews was based on the theories as presented in the literature review, as can be seen in the following table (see [Table 1](#)).

The research population for the interviews was general managers or HRM/HRD managers (depending on the size of the organisation) employed by Dutch hotels between January and July 2018. Ten experts agreed to participate in the study, after which no data saturation was reached so another five interviews were planned until data saturation was reached. The experts were selected through a select sample using the snowball method. The participants were selected based on availability to participate and were approached via the researcher's network striving for a high-quality sample with variability through select sampling. The total research stretched over a 17-month period, the interviews were done between March 2018 and June 2018.

The data analysis was done by coding, based on the model of [Strauss and Corbin \(1990\)](#). The first stage is open coding, this is the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising the data. This results in concepts, which will be used in the second stage of axial coding. With axial coding connections are made between categories by linking codes to contexts, consequences, patterns and causes ([Bryman and Bell, 2015](#)). In the third and last stage of selective coding, the core category is selected and is related to other categories, validating those relationships and this creates the storyline according to [Strauss and Corbin \(1990\)](#).

The literature review focussed on research in the service industry in Western societies to minimise the chances of coincidence. This makes the research more reliable as it focussed on a certain industry (the service industry) and is replicable in that industry. The literature review covers key academic theories to minimise researcher subjectivity. A certain amount of subjectivity is also unavoidable with respect to the expert interviews. However, by taping, transcribing, coding and then analysing, the researcher endeavoured to limit the subjectivity and make the research as transparent as possible.

Results

A total of 15 in-depth interviews have been conducted with human resource (HR) or general managers of different hotels, 14 of which are commercial and one a teaching hotel connected to a hotel school. Eight hotels are located in Limburg, four of which are located in Maastricht. Four hotels are located in Amsterdam and one each in Nijmegen, Leiden and Rotterdam. The hotel size ranges from 40 rooms to over 400 rooms; the number of stars ranges from three to five.

Topic	Theory	Sub-topics
Learning climate	<a href="#">Nikolova et al. (2014b)</a>	(1) Facilitation (2) Appreciation (3) Error avoidance
Informal learning	<a href="#">Nikolova et al. (2014a)</a>	(1) Learning through reflection (2) Learning through experimentation (3) Learning from colleagues (4) Learning from supervisors
Formal learning	<a href="#">Van Der Heijden et al. (2009)</a>	Open questions with factual, objective information
Perceived organisational performance	<a href="#">Delaney and Huselid (1996)</a>	(1) Perceived organisational performance (2) Perceived market performance
Innovative work behaviour	<a href="#">Janssen (2000; 2001)</a>	(1) Idea generation (2) Idea promotion (3) Idea realisation

**Table 1.**  
Topic list in-depth  
interviews

### Learning

The importance of workplace learning is confirmed in all the interviews. The participants emphasise that supply and demand on the labour market are out of balance and organisations realise they need to take care of their people. *“Human Resources becomes more and more important, it is about our future, we need good people to perform.”* Learning is one of the solutions to make the industry more interesting and attractive to work in for these employees. Another reason learning is important is that new employees need to become accustomed to the standards of their individual brand. The organisations are very aware of this talking about the onboarding process of their employees, which often comes with extensive formal and informal learning. A third reason why participants mention the importance of learning in hospitality is the mismatch between education and practice. Hospitality needs hands, people who are willing to work and have a passion for the profession; as one of the participants describes: *“We need fewer and fewer people at the administrative high level, we need more and more professionals.”* The participants mention that the basics should be learned in school and this knowledge can be extended in the workplace.

Every organisation interviewed has plenty of possibilities to learn, and learning is stimulated. *“It is very much in the culture of our hotel.”* However, the smaller hotels mention that due to work pressure as a result of considerable employee shortages, learning, especially formal learning, is one of the first things to be left behind. The participants agree learning can be offered to employees to broaden their views, to give them responsibilities and challenge them and as a reward for their good work.

With respect to error avoidance, all participants mention that making mistakes is acceptable. They say it is better to make a bad decision than no decision at all: *“done is better than perfect”*. Another participant mentions: *“We want people to be able to make decisions, but then it’s also very important that people can make mistakes.”* However, the frequency of the mistake is key: at a certain point the employee must learn from the mistake and it should not happen again.

The possibilities offered for formal learning vary per organisation. Many hotels that are part of a bigger chain offer their own training. Employees often receive a certificate for these trainings. One participant says: *“Standardised training is not a waste of money, but the exact needs and whether it fits really needs to be examined critically.”*

The bigger hotels, often part of a large chain, also offer extensive online learning opportunities. One issue here is whether the average hospitality employee is the type to sit down at their computer to learn online.

When it comes to informal learning, hotels recognised different forms of informal learning. Although experimentation is limited in the hotels interviewed, considerable differences were found between hotels, depending on size and luxury level. The bigger and the more luxurious the hotel, the more difficult it is to experiment and keep the desired quality of service. However, all hotels agree, when experiments are done, communication is key, generally done during daily, weekly and monthly meetings. One of the smaller hotels mentioned the general manager gave the employees all some responsibility in which they could extend their knowledge, for example, the wine menu, the interior, safety, kitchen plans and so on. In monthly meetings, the plans were presented to the entire team. This idea was received very good and employees gave as feedback that they learned a lot about a certain aspect and learned a lot from each other.

Another aspect of informal learning is reflection. Briefings, especially the morning briefing, are an important part of reflection. In the morning briefing the previous day, the upcoming day and the most important events are discussed. *“Every morning we have morning briefings where the day is discussed and the day of yesterday is discussed.”* The process the organisations go through when mistakes are made also shows reflection is part of the organisation.



With respect to learning from colleagues, the participants stress the generational differences. *"The older employees are very proud to share their experience and be able to give something to the younger employees"*. Another participant also highlights the reverse process, where older employees learn from young employees, about technology, for example. Especially during onboarding, learning from colleagues is important. Employees also get the opportunity to share their knowledge and experience with other employees in the hotel during inter-departmental or cross-trainings. One participant mentions students also impact learning between colleagues: *"Sometimes it's nice when a student comes with new fresh ideas that you can learn from"*.

Learning from supervisors is organised formally and informally. For example, when a mistake is made, learning happens on the work floor during a conversation at the end of the day. In the evaluation interviews, one participant also mentions that they are *"really giving them feedback on how they are performing."*

#### *Organisational performance*

With respect to organisational performance, all hotels emphasise the importance of measuring performance. This is done every day and discussed in daily, weekly and monthly meetings. However, these are mostly finance-related indicators or quality measures as review scores and guest experiences. The general manager makes the comparison to its competitors, mostly from a marketing perspective.

Having never asked the question, none of the participants can say with certainty or without making assumptions what employees think of the hotel compared to competitors. Three participants had some question marks about this issue as they believe employees are not interested in or capable of making such comparisons.

Nearly all participants mention that the employees come up with ideas to improve the processes and/or organisation. Also, nearly every hotel reported some interference of the manager in these ideas, especially when money was involved.

The organisations have different methods for collecting ideas. Although they can always be mentioned during meetings or the annual performance interviews, the employee survey also offers an opportunity. The suggestion box was also mentioned in some of the interviews. There were positive and negative views on the suggestion box among the participants. One participant mentioned it is a great way to collect ideas; however, another participant countered this. When employees need a suggestion box to be able to share their ideas, then something is going wrong with the communication and relations in the organisation. This should also be possible in the daily, weekly and monthly meetings.

The role of the supervisor and/or manager is important in making ideas work in the organisation. Some participants mention that ideas are blocked in the organisation. For example, when supervisors blow off ideas because they have already tried it and just say it does not work: *"this kills creativity in the organisation."* The role of the supervisor or manager is to give guidance, help the employee fine-tune the idea and assess feasibility together with the employee and to keep a close eye on the budgetary consequences of the idea. *"Don't shoot down the idea too quickly, but let the employees experiment and experience what happens and learn from that."* As another participant mentions: *"When somebody else shines, you shine as well. As a leader, the light reflects on you."*

#### *Relation between learning and organisational performance*

Almost all participants confirm a positive relation, whereas no one mentions a negative relation between learning and organisational performance. The better the organisation takes care of the employees, the better the employees take care of the guests, and overall service and quality in the organisation improve. *"Of course, learning in the workplace influences the*



*organisation's performance.*" When employees get the opportunity to learn and develop, they get new ideas, which they can use to improve the organisation and provide even better service for guests.

The forms of informal learning the organisations use, such as learning from colleagues, briefings or the onboarding process, are part of the day-to-day operations of the organisations. These forms of informal learning were implemented to increase quality of services.

In addition, it is important for organisations to keep innovating and keep learning through their employees to continuously improve. If not done right, the hotel will not survive in this continuously changing and innovative world. The same is true for employees and their personal development, they also have to keep up to date with everything that changes.

The experts are not able to make a connection between perceived organisational performance and workplace learning. However, they do recognise that overall organisational performance and innovative work behaviour are both positively influenced by learning in the workplace.

## Discussion and conclusion

### Discussion

As MGI (2017) and WEF (2017) report on a large part of the industry susceptible to automation, the hospitality industry changes and different tasks will become more important (Stoffers *et al.*, 2019). This was mentioned in only one of the interviews: "*We need fewer and fewer people at the administrative high level, we need more and more professionals.*"

It is notable that whenever the participants were asked about experimental learning as part of informal learning, the participants in the research mentioned that working with experimental learning in the industry is difficult. However, when talking about innovative work behaviour, the participants mention they are open to ideas. These ideas are also a form of experiential learning. In addition, guest reviews and complaints also make for continuously learning organisations as they have to act and adapt based on these complaints. Even though the term experimental learning is not used, in other words, it is a form of learning used in hospitality, woven into the processes of the organisation.

Reflection is also integrated into the hospitality organisations' processes. When employees make a mistake, the process the participants describe includes reflection on the mistake. The morning briefing also reflects on the previous day and the reviews left by the guests. Therefore, reflection can also be considered a way of learning with a unique place in the hospitality organisations.

Research shows that although 80% of all learning is intrinsically informal, organisations spend 80% of their budget on formal learning, which accounts for less than 20% of learning in the organisation (Arets and Heijnen, 2011). This also seems to be the case in hospitality, as many of the informal learning processes as described earlier happen unconsciously and much focus is placed on formal learning opportunities, especially in larger hotels.

Just as the literature shows (Aslander and Witteveen, 2015; Hart, 2015; Zopiatis and Theocharous, 2018), one participant mentions that any type of learning is of crucial importance for hospitality organisations to stay up to date and to survive in this era of continuous change.

Just as the research shows (Kusluvan *et al.*, 2010; Marginson, 2017; Nolan and Caravan, 2016; Rebelo and Gomes, 2017; Van Der Heijden *et al.*, 2009), the research participants also acknowledge the positive effects of investing in HRD and a learning climate on employee capability, employability and organisational performance. The better the organisation takes care of its employees, the better the employees take care of the guests, improving overall service and quality in the organisation. In addition, the participants and literature mention

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that learning is an important factor for the organisation to remain innovative, which is necessary to survive in this continuously changing world ([Aslander and Witteveen, 2015](#)).

### *Conclusion*

This research acknowledges that HRD in hospitality is more important than ever before and only becomes more important as the industry needs good people to perform.

Hotels focus mostly on informal learning. The larger hotels, often part of a chain, also offer a lot of opportunities for formal learning, for example, in academies. Learning through reflection and learning from colleagues and leaders is recognised by all participants. Learning through experimentation happens when ideas from employees are presented or to solve complaints of guests.

With respect to organisational performance, all hotels emphasise the importance of measuring performance. This is done every day and discussed in daily, weekly and monthly meetings. Hospitality organisations measure organisational performance, such as financial performance, quality measures, guest reviews and marketing.

The participants could not answer the questions about perceived organisational performance according to the theory of [Delaney and Huselid \(1996\)](#). Participants, however, do recognise innovative work behaviour as organisational performance and confirm that learning is an important factor for the organisation to remain innovative.

Overall, employees are stimulated to use the many learning opportunities hotels offer, as the participants believe firmly that learning and development enhance organisational performance. An excellent HR package, including learning and development, tempts employees to work in hospitality and stay with the organisation. The participants in the research and the literature therefor conclude that learning is important to improve organisational performance.

### *Practical implications*

The participants and literature were very clear about the effect of learning on organisational performance and confirmed a positive relation. When organisations give employees the opportunity to learn, this improves the quality of service in the organisation and employees are more likely to stay with the organisation.

This research shows the importance of leadership when it comes to learning and idea promotion and realisation, for example, the case of a smaller hotel where the general manager gives employees' responsibility and freedom to come with ideas as a form of informal learning. Proper leadership practices are an important predictor for employees' willingness to change, novel ideas and innovative work behaviour ([Stoffers and Mordant-Dols, 2015](#)). Leadership practices in this regard are to give guidance, help the employee fine-tune ideas and assess feasibility together with the employee and to keep a close eye on the budgetary consequences of the idea. Leaders need to show organisational sensitivity, as the research shows the different needs for small and larger organisations and the more or less luxurious hotels.

The results of this study show that supply and demand of labour in the hospitality industry are out of balance and that there is a mismatch between formal educational programmes, the expectations of students in these educational programmes and the expectations of the industry. Therefore, learning is important in the onboarding phase of the employee and to manage expectations during the recruitment and onboarding. Managers need to have a clear perspective on the competences, skills and professional attitude they require from their employees. Managers need to offer training to facilitate skills development and give employees the opportunity to learn from each other. In the hospitality industry, this can be done in the employee briefings or evaluations. Next to that it is important for hotels to

keep close relations with educational programmes and also manage expectations there, from the students as well as the educational programme. Therefore, it is important to provide guest lectures, for example, to keep close relations with the lecturers and internship coordinators and to manage mutual expectations.

#### *Limitations to the research*

Next to a literature review, this study used qualitative research methods, and therefore, its subjectivity should be considered. Endeavours were made to limit subjectivity as much as possible by the method of analysis and the interview schedules.

Another limitation is that the interviews were held with general managers and HR managers, rather than employees. The research participants' subjectivity should therefore also be considered.

Since these interviews were done at a time when the economy was thriving, the organisations had money, time and a need for learning. However, as [Arets and Heijnen \(2011\)](#) mention, when money gets tight, the first thing to be cut is the budget for training and development. It is therefore difficult to say whether learning enhances organisational performance or whether organisational performance enhances learning in the workplace.

Another limitation is that the participants could not answer the questions about perceived organisational performance according to the theory of [Delaney and Huselid \(1996\)](#). Therefore, not the entire conceptual model could be answered. Follow-up research could be done into perceived organisational performance in the Dutch hospitality industry.

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