

Building Bridges: Enhancing Collaboration between Academic Institutions and Industrial Partners

Author: Dr.Dharna Shukla, Assistant Professor, Amity School of Hospitality, Amity University Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow Campus

In the hospitality industry, housekeeping stands as one of the cornerstone departments responsible for maintaining cleanliness, hygiene, and orderliness within hotels. From guest rooms to public areas, the housekeeping team ensures that the hotel environment meets the highest standards of cleanliness and comfort. However, there exists a significant gap between the academic curriculum taught in hospitality management programs and the practical standards required in the industrial setting of hotel housekeeping. Bridging this knowledge gap is crucial for producing competent professionals who can effectively meet the demands and expectations of the hospitality industry.

Understanding Academic Standards:

Hospitality management programs often include courses on housekeeping operations, covering topics such as cleaning procedures, sanitation practices, inventory management, and guest service standards. These academic standards provide students with a theoretical foundation in housekeeping principles and practices, emphasizing the importance of cleanliness, attention to detail, and customer satisfaction. Students may also gain hands-on experience through internships or practicum courses, where they apply theoretical knowledge in real-world hotel settings.

Challenges in Academic Preparation:

While academic programs strive to impart relevant knowledge and skills, they may face challenges in fully preparing students for the realities of hotel housekeeping. One challenge is the limited scope of academic coursework, which may not encompass the breadth and depth of tasks encountered in a hotel housekeeping department. Many institutions have a lengthy process of bringing changes to the curricula. Hence, the same syllabus is followed over the years. Additionally, the dynamic nature of the hospitality industry means that academic curricula may struggle to keep pace with evolving trends, technologies, and best practices in housekeeping operations.

Industrial Standards in Hotel Housekeeping:

In contrast to academic standards, industrial standards in hotel housekeeping are shaped by the practical realities of the hospitality workplace. Hotel housekeeping departments operate within a fast-paced, customer-centric environment where efficiency, quality, and attention to detail are paramount. Industrial standards encompass a wide range of practices, including:

- **Cleaning Protocols:** Hotel housekeeping staff follow established cleaning protocols to ensure consistency and thoroughness in cleaning guest rooms, bathrooms, corridors, and public areas. These protocols may include specific techniques for making beds, vacuuming carpets, dusting furniture, sanitizing surfaces and use of sustainable cleaning agents. Specially, post Covid 19 pandemic, housekeeping in hotels, hospitals and other facilities has seen immense change in protocols and technology.
- **Quality Control:** Quality control measures are implemented to maintain high standards of cleanliness and presentation throughout the hotel. Supervisors conduct regular inspections to identify any deficiencies and ensure that corrective actions are taken promptly. Guest feedback and satisfaction surveys also play a crucial role in assessing the effectiveness of housekeeping services.
- **Inventory Management:** Housekeeping departments are responsible for managing inventory levels of cleaning supplies, linens, amenities, and other consumable items. Efficient inventory management practices help minimize waste, control costs, and ensure that adequate supplies are available to meet operational needs.
- **Training and Development:** Ongoing training and development programs are essential for equipping housekeeping staff with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to perform their duties effectively. Training topics may include safety procedures, chemical handling, equipment operation, customer service, and communication skills.

Bridging the Knowledge Gap:

To bridge the gap between academic and industrial standards in hotel housekeeping, collaboration between academia and the hospitality industry is essential. Here are some strategies to facilitate this collaboration:

- **Industry Partnerships:** Academic institutions can establish partnerships with hotels and resorts to provide students with practical training opportunities, internships, and industry insights. Guest lectures, site visits, and joint research projects can also enhance students' understanding of real-world housekeeping practices. Encouraging students to take up vocational training in hotels during vacations can lead to a positive exposure of learning for the students. In return, the hotels can impart the skills and absorb them as an employee at a later stage.
- **Updated Curriculum:** Hospitality management programs should regularly review and update their curriculum (upto 20% every academic year) to reflect current industry trends, standards, and technologies in housekeeping operations. Incorporating case studies, simulations, and guest speakers from the industry can provide students with a more holistic understanding of housekeeping management. Another aspect is integrating Housekeeping as a curriculum in schools under the New Education Policy 2020. This would arouse the interests of students encouraging them to take up further studies in the same and eventually carve out a career in housekeeping later.
- **Professional Development:** Continuing education and professional development opportunities should be offered to both students and industry professionals to keep them abreast of the latest advancements in housekeeping practices. Certifications, workshops, and conferences both from the academia and industry likewise can provide valuable networking opportunities and facilitate knowledge exchange between academia and the industry.
- **Research and Innovation:** Academic research in housekeeping management can contribute to the development of innovative solutions, best practices, and industry standards. Collaborative research projects involving academia, industry partners, and professional associations can address emerging challenges and drive continuous improvement in housekeeping operations.

Sharing my own long experience in housekeeping operations in hotels and hospitals with students and bringing my knowledge to the classrooms as a present academician has been fruitful for the students and vice-versa. Imparting my understanding of the industry and provoking the thought process in students lead to the quest for solutions, thus directing students to reach out to the

industry and look for answers. Bridging the knowledge gap between academic and industrial standards in hotel housekeeping is essential for preparing students and professionals to excel in the dynamic and demanding hospitality industry. Through collaboration, updating curricula, providing practical training opportunities, and promoting research and innovation, academia and the hospitality industry can work together to ensure that housekeeping professionals possess the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to meet the evolving needs and expectations of guests and stakeholders.