ETHICAL IDEALS AND EXPECTATIONS REGARDING VISITOR, STAFF, AND MANAGEMENT AMONG POTENTIAL TOURIST INDUSTRY EMPLOYEES

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This study has examined ideal ethical beliefs together with perceived visitor, staff, and management ethical expectations, and also employment context preferences among a sample of secondary college students in a major Australian tourist destination, many of whom would likely later seek postsecondary college education for or immediate employment within the tourism industry. It has been found that ethical ideals generally exceeded those perceived to be held by current tourism industry staff and also tourism industry management; respondent ideals were perceived to be similar to those of visitors, except in regard to precepts such as helpfulness and frankness. Those less likely to perceive a divergence between ideal and actual staff friendliness were the ones more likely to favor tourism/hospitality/retail and also tourism/transport employment contexts. Finally, those graduands more likely to perceive themselves as holding ethical beliefs significantly different from visitors in regard to frankness were the ones more likely to deem tourism industry employment contexts as undesirable. Implications of these various findings are addressed.

Key words: Ethics; Values; Aristotelian virtues

Within career decision making, ethics are widely regarded as having a major influence in individuals' lives, no matter what the age or the life stage at which the individual may be (Boyatzis, McKee, & Goleman, 2002). Argyle (1989) has found that personal values exerted considerable sway over both career choice and direction. Moreover, Emsler (1995) suggests that vocational decision making does not belong solely to adult life; young people entering the school-work transition phase often have developed both beliefs and intentions with respect to the world of work. They are likely to have begun the process of forming intentions as to preferred work contexts and also beliefs about individuals already operating within those contexts, such as employers, employees, and customers. Emsler further argues that personal values are important components of this career decision-making process; they are likely to accompany the individual into the various preparatory stages for work life, and then on into the workplace.

Arnold (2001) advances a sociocognitive psychological perspective as a way of providing valuable

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insights into such processes. He cites the work of Moss and Frieze (1993), who have found that students' preferences among job offers were associated with the extent to which offers matched students' desired job attributes, and also the degree to which students' stereotypes of people already working within the jobs offered matched their self-concept. Arnold further argues that career decision making might usefully be comprehended within the context of a person-environment interaction, a context in which personal values and ethical precepts of the individual should not be underestimated. Commentators such as Furnham (1997) also suggest that motivation to a particular workplace might best be understood by the fit as between the characteristics of the individual, such as their value systems, and perceptions regarding the demands of the job and the characteristics of the employers, the employees, and the customers. He also argues that an understanding of how prospective employees conceptualize and rate the elements of workplaces is vital in any successful management decision making; it will have long-term implications for both productivity and work satisfaction.

Human Values

Considerable research has now been conducted in the domain of human values. The most widely known theorist is this field, Milton Rokeach, has advanced the notion of values as preferences for desirable life states (such as freedom or equality) or as ethical behavior (such as honesty or altruism). Values are said to be organized within an overall system, which Rokeach (1973) describes as an enduring hierarchy of component values along a continuum of relative importance. He further suggests that an individual's value system is remarkably stable, and may be measured in various ways. Rokeach had people rank order lists of instrumental and terminal values according to how important such values were regarded so to be as guiding principles within their lives. Stability in value systems has come to be understood by many commentators within the overall context of the importance of values to the integrity of the self. The stability of value systems is believed important in the expression of the coherence of the self over time and across life situations (Feather, 1975, 1996; Rokeach, 1973).

Ethical values are here conceptualized as beliefs about desirable or undesirable ways of behaving, or about the desirability or otherwise of general goals. Values are more abstract than are attitudes and are regarded as transcending specific objects, events, and situations. Moreover, they are regarded as serving an evaluative function: individuals are said to employ these various ethical precepts when they judge outcomes, events, and behavior, or when they make decisions upon particular courses of action that typically involve both life goals and those people about them.

Ethics and Tourism

A range of studies has now appeared within the tourism/hospitality literature, relating ethical understandings to specific industry contexts: leisure studies (McNamee, Sheridan, & Buswell, 2001); tourism (Fennell, 1998); codes of ethics (Couglan, 2001); ecotourism(Malloy&Fennell, 1998a, 1998b). Tourism/hospitality ethics education has also seen a rise in interest within the last decade. Vallen and Casado (2000) have suggested that there is a pressing need to prepare students to logically and ethically solve industry dilemmas that they will undoubtedly encounter. There have now been a number of studies examining ethical decision-making styles within educational contexts (Enghagen & Hort, 1992: Hall & Enghagen, 1991; Kent, Liam, Kahn, & Anene, 1993; Wheeler, 1994). Stevens (2001) has examined the responses of human resource managers and hospitality students to a range of ethical scenarios that include issues such as theft, racial prejudice, keeping gifts, and false accusations; she reports that both human resource managers and students rated the act of theft the most unethical, followed by sexual harassment, and then an attempt to obtain propriety information. Finally, she makes the point that a great deal still needs to be understood with respect to the basic assumptions and manner by which students go about making their ethical decisions.

The Derivation of Ethical Beliefs

Ethics, until the latter half or the 20th century, was basically the domain of two major theories: utilitarianism and Kantian or deontological philosophy. Deontological theory arose, in large measure, from the works of the 18th century philosopher Immanual

Kant; utilitarianism is generally associated with the works of philosophers Jeremy Bentham and J. S. Mill. In recent years, virtue ethics has come to represent an approach to ethics highlighting ethical character; such a view is in clear contrast to the approaches that emphasize rules and duties (deontological) or an emphasis upon the consequences of a citizen's action (utilitarianism). Virtue ethics would seek to emphasize the character of the person in the understanding of any ethical action. Commentators such as Hursthouse (1997) suggest that virtue ethics is both an old and a new theory: old in that it may be traced back to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and new in that it has been revived in the second part of the 20th century.

Aristotle suggested that virtues are general traits of character revealed in habitual actions. Pincoffs (1996) has argued that Aristotelian virtues can be more precisely defined as traits of character manifested in habitual actions that are said to be good for a person to have. While Aristotle argued that many virtues may be identified, Rachels (1995) has distinguished four virtues from Aristotle's work that are held to be of prime importance in daily life: courage, generosity, honesty, and loyalty to family, friends, and close associates. Rachels (1998) makes the point that the major virtues are determined not by social convention or fashion, but rather by basic facts about the common human condition. This research has sought to explore the applicability of four major Aristotelian values of courage, generosity, honesty, and loyalty among potential tourism/hospitality industry employees, as they are perceived to be esteemed by visitors, tourism industry staff and management, and also may mediate industry employment context preferences.

Method

Subjects

The sample for this study comprised 493 students enrolled in years 11 and 12 in a number of state high schools from the Cairns region of Northern Australia. The survey was conducted during August and September, when many were considering postsecondary college study or employment options. Ross (1995, 1997, 1998) reports that there is a high level of interest among secondary college graduates in tourism/hospitality industry management employment.

Measures

Students rated each of the following ethical precepts, according to how important they believed them to be rated by tourism/hospitality industry staff, by tourism/hospitality industry management, and by visitors, and, finally, how important they personally regarded them to be. The four ethical value precepts represent the notions as suggested by Aristotle and Pincoffs (1996), and have also appeared in the writings of both Rokeach and Feather; furthermore, each ethical precept was adapted to the tourism/hospitality industry workplace context, particularly as each precept may be interpreted within a service quality framework (Noe, 1999). The four precepts rated were: being friendly, being honest, being frank, and being helpful. They were rated on a 5-point scale with 5 = important and 1 = unimportant.

Respondents were also requested to rate each of the following work context preferences: mining, manufacturing, forestry, high technology, rural, light industries, tourism, heavy industries, service industries, transport, government, education, commerce/finance, retail, and hospitality. These were rated on a 5-point scale with 5 = highly preferred and 1 = not preferred at all. Age and gender of all respondents were also recorded.

Procedure

The instrument was distributed among the major state high schools in the Far North Queensland region of Australia and administered to students during class hours by a careers counselor in each school; the nonresponse rate was less than 11%.

Results and Discussion

Analyses from this study have found that graduands conceptualized tourism industry employment as being represented by two separate domains: that of tourism transport employment, and that of tourism, hospitality, and retail employment. Employment in airlines, bus lines, tour operations, rail, coach lines, taxi companies, limousine services, etc., was clearly regarded as a separate and distinct domain to that of other tourism, hospitality, and retail employment. However, it should be noted that these two discrete employment domains were not found to be different with regard to ethical predictors.

This study also revealed that ethical precepts and divergences between various ethical precept ratings varied considerably. Ethical ideals were generally ranked higher than perceived tourism staff ratings and also perceived tourism management ratings; this was evident with regard to the friendliness ethical divergence (i.e., between respondents' ideal and perceived tourism staff ideal). Students clearly declared that they were, or would be, more friendly toward visitors than current tourism industry personnel. These potential staff also regarded themselves as being similar in terms of friendliness to that level expected by visitors. For the helpfulness and frankness precepts, however, respondents perceived themselves as differing markedly from visitors: visitors were seen to expect more helpfulness than the students believed they should offer, whereas the respondents declared an ethical obligation to be somewhat more frank than was deemed to be ideal, at least as they anticipated the ideal of the visitors.

It was also found that the friendliness ethical ideal-staff divergence was a significant predictor of tourism industry employment preference, for both the tourism transport preference factor and also the tourism, hospitality, and retail preference factor. Respondents more likely to reveal beliefs wherein their personal ethical precepts and their perception of tourism industry staff ethical precepts relating to friendliness were little or no different emerged as the ones most likely to choose either of the tourism/hospitality employment contexts. Respondents who regarded themselves as being similar, at least in regard to this major ethical belief, to current industry employees, were the ones who most desired future employment in the tourism/hospitality industry in its various manifestations; those for whom this friendliness gulf was wider did not desire such employment.

Two ethical precepts provoking differences between respondents and visitors were helpfulness and frankness. Visitors, it was commonly believed, required more help than many students were willing to offer. These findings do raise concerns regarding service quality. Many of these students may have developed a distorted view of what it is that visitors require in terms of service. A number of this group may also be unsuited, by reason of temperament or perspective, for tourism industry employment, or indeed any service industry employment wherein pleasant and satisfying staff-visitor interactions are an essential element of the product. Tourism is, at core, an experience, and negative visitor experiences with regard to staff service will greatly detract from that experience. The tourism/hospitality industry, in its recruiting and also in its overall publicity endeavors, might well benefit from being mindful of such issues.

Findings with regard to frankness also raise similar concerns. The greater the perception of this visitor frankness expectation, and also the greater the divergence between respondent ideal and perceived visitor expectation, the more respondents were found to dislike the prospect of tourism/hospitality industry employment. Frankness is possibly here being interpreted as some type of bluntness, an assertiveness that takes little account of the sensitivities, the confusion, and even the vulnerabilities experienced by some visitors. If this is so, then such individuals may need to reconsider whether or not their present outlook will lead to a happy and rewarding career within this industry and its clients. Those for whom frankness, as a personal value and also as a visitor expectation, is much more synchronous may be more service oriented and understanding of visitors in unfamiliar environments; visitors who do often appreciate a candor and openness displayed by staff when those staff members temper frank responses with both insight and courtesy.

Limitations to this study should also be addressed. The study was not primarily concerned with the behavior of consumers; it involved ethical expectations that tourists are expected to embrace. This study also did not involve those people presently employed within the tourism/hospitality industry. Rather, it was directed toward those secondary college students within a major Australian tourism community, many of whom would soon seek entry into such employment or enroll in postsecondary or university courses, a major emphasis of which would be preparation for such employment. Future research on this topic area, based upon samples from postsecondary/university and also industry employment contexts, might provide some insight into how maturation, education, and employment could mediate change upon ethical structures. Finally, this research did not include behavioral outcome variables; specific position-seeking, position-acquisition, position-accep-

tance, and position-socialization success measures should be investigated to further understand the various relationships between ethical values and tourism/hospitality work-directed behaviors.

In conclusion, this study revealed clear associations with respect to ethical precepts, ethical perceptions and expectations, and tourism industry employment context preferences. These findings build upon the understandings of ethical precepts as they mediate important decision making within tourism industry arenas, and lend support to the utility of Aristotelian ethical conceptualizations in the understanding of ethical values in the tourism/hospitality arena. While some findings from this study give cause for optimism in terms of future service quality levels, other findings may not be so encouraging. The tourism industry, in its recruiting endeavors, requires a clear and energetic focus upon the nature of ethics and ethical expectations among those whom it chooses to employ, if it is to assure its reputation as an industry of integrity and also see service quality enhanced.

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