

Work Integrated Learning for the culturally diverse Hospitality Industry in South Africa and the example of Germany

Prof. Angelo Nicolaidis
Graduate School of Business Leadership
University of South Africa
nicola@unisa.ac.za

Abstract

The hospitality industry in South Africa, including hotels, motels, guest houses, and bed and breakfast operations, restaurants, fast food outlets, catering companies, night clubs, pubs and time share, will be in dire straits if new employees, more especially graduates are not skilled and appropriately competent. Many students undertake a mandatory Work Integrated Learning (WIL- experiential learning, internship period), period in the hospitality industry which is usually a significant undertaking. A number of students are not provided with the necessary opportunity to perfect their skills and are often frustrated by their experience which is far from satisfactory as far as they are concerned. This paper maintains that the student/trainee should be provided greater opportunities from which to learn more about how the industry functions and empowered to be effective in the future industry role they will serve in as is the case in Germany, and this should be the primary concern of both industry and the education provider. Industry often considers students to be cheap sources of semi-skilled or skilled labour and uses them to fill gaps in staffing shortages without following a meaningful programme. What should be done to facilitate a smoother experiential learning for the learners and how can we learn from the experiences of the hospitality industry in leaders in the field such as Germany?

Keywords: WIL, facilitation, hospitality industry, experiential learning, integration, mutualism, co-operative education, competitive edge



Introduction

The notion of learners going to a hospitality industry business to gain experience is one which includes the learner, the education institution in which he/she is a student and the 'employer' who represents the business in which the learner is placed. Each of these players has a distinct agenda. The National Commission for Co-operative Education presented a relatively all-encompassing definition of Work Integrated Learning (WIL) as a prepared strategy which integrates classroom and highly productive work experiences in the field which is related to a particular student's academic or vocational objectives and goals (Groenewald, 2004: 17). In terms of such a definition, the learner will be primarily concerned with learning more about his/her chosen industry and will probably view the entire process as one which enhances his/her employability once graduated. The educator will see the experience as one which allows the learner to investigate the nature of the industry in a more intimate fashion. Jones and Quick (2007:30-31) assert that WIL is considered to be an educational strategy where learning in the classroom alternates with periods of carefully planned and coordinated learning in the workplace which creates an environment in which the competencies of students may be developed and where they are carefully nurtured by mentor from both the workplace and the educational institution.

The 'employing' business will in all likelihood tend to view the exercise as one which provides cheap labour and may perceive itself to be a caring partner. Whichever agenda is met, one thing remains certain and that is the strategic importance of experiential learning in the hospitality and tourism industry. The notion and value of Co-operative Education is emphasized by various authors such as Abeysekera,

(2006: 7-15) who provides a comprehensive definition of the practice. He regards it as work-integrated learning in which the time used up in the workplace is part and parcel of a student's academic study program. There are important provisos however. Many employers in the hospitality state that students are generally not sufficiently prepared for the hospitality workplace and they appeal to universities to produce more employable graduates (Barrie, 2006; Kember & Leung, 2005). This should be done by providing students with useful and transferable skills that can be applied in the workplace whether it be an hotel, motel or guesthouse or any other related enterprise (Smith, Clegg, Lawrence & Todd, 2007).

In South Africa, students working towards obtaining qualifications in disciplines such as such as Hotel Management or Food and Beverage Management are required to complete a period of WIL or internship as part of their academic programs. The primary aim of the WIL period is to give students the opportunity to learn relevant skills, competencies, policies, systems and procedures in each and every department they could be working in at a hotel for example. CATHSSETA which is the hospitality chamber plays a vital role in assisting learners to gain access to hospitality internships in the following areas, Front of House, Accommodation Services, Housekeeping, Food and Beverage, Accounting, Sales and Marketing (CATHSSETA).

In terms of the Skills Development Act of 1998 and the National Skills Development Strategy, CATHSSETA must establish, register, promote and administer Learnerships in the Tourism, Hospitality, Sport, Arts and Culture sectors. Learnership serve as another intervention in the host of interventions the industry can choose to use in training and developing their staff. The learnership mode of training only differs from the rest in a sense

that it provides an opportunity for learners to acquire a qualification whilst predominantly being in the world of work. A Learnership is an occupationally related learning programme that: consists of a structured learning and specified practical work experience components, culminates in a qualification that is registered on the National Qualification Framework, is registered with Department of Higher Education and Training, is related to an occupation (CATHSSETA).

There exists a symbiosis or mutualism between each stakeholder, whether it be the student, industry, the higher education institution or CATHSSETA which some stakeholders do not realize exists – to the detriment of the hospitality industry in general. There is thus a need to increase and widen participation to ensure that learners are all equipped with the necessary mix of knowledge and skills. Learners need to be able to identify and promote good practice in the hospitality industry. A prospective hospitality industry employee must be given the economic and strategic importance of his/her career choice for the country in general and must be guided to this realization by both education providers and the industry. Industry has a great deal to offer the prospective employee. It should clarify the workplace situation for the learner and allow a practical application and work – readiness to become the norm. Rittichainuwat, Worth, Hanson and Rattanapninanchai (2010), concentrate their attention on reinforcing the great importance of integrating the hospitality industry and the academic environment by them working in partnership with one another all related aspects such as the curriculum design, mode of instruction and training, and expectations during what may be extended periods of internship as is the case in Germany. They concur that in whatever form or shape, WIL/experiential learning/cooperative education plays a

vital role in supplying the industry with sought after hard and soft skills and it greatly enhances the familiarity of learners with the industry and its expectations.

Effective WIL

The secret to economic competitiveness for any country lies in the realization that the training and education of the workforce are essential to success. It is apparent that countries that invest in all the human elements and not just the perceived academic elite, will ultimately have the superior economies (Hayes, 1989). The soft or behavioral skills such as those obtained via the curricula of institutions of higher learning, that embed critical outcomes including various analytical skills such as *inter alia* teamwork, organizing and managing oneself, usually tend to deliver students who are highly competent and thus more employable (Coll & Zegwaard, 2006). The literature reviewed generally refers to WIL as either work-based learning (Wagner, Childs, & Houlbrook, 2001) or experience-based learning (Beard & Wilson, 2002). Reeders (2000: 205) argues that the term WIL was adopted to include the increasing diversity in the methodologies and approaches to vocational education as they are used globally. WIL is generally the most appropriate term to use in hospitality and related educational practices in which students spend time in industry as a requirement of their studies.

Pratt (1996) maintains that WIL/Experiential learning/cooperative education are very important educational philosophies in which the formalization and integration of work experience into the theoretical curriculum is of the essence. If high quality hospitality employees are to be unleashed onto the South African economy a culture of learning must pervade the ethos of the industry. Hoteliers and other service industry

providers will need to alter their attitudes and refocus on what is required for success. This views of Alderman and Milne (2005: 1) are upheld by higher education institutions in South Africa, which are obliged in accordance with the South African Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF), Department of Education Government Notice No 928, which is gazetted (No. 30353, 5 October 2007 as policy in terms of the Higher Education Act), to place students in WIL as a requirement of operation.

Hospitality employers in South Africa and the region are generally not satisfied with the learners' level of proactivity, their desire to learn, and their ability to satisfy customer needs, plan and organize and be professional at all times. Oliver *et al.* (1997) stress that such aspects are critically important since they form a bridge between the individual, society and the environment. To help improve matters, Alderman and Milne created a workable model for the effective use of WIL. The model emphasizes the importance of the various linkages that exist between and which impact the interactions between each of the academics, students and mentors, both in the workplace and from the educational institution.

In Britain, for example, training provision for the hospitality industry is at rock-bottom when compared to Germany and the United States (Storey, 1989). German and American hospitality industry employers spend about 3 percent of their turnover on training as opposed to Britain's paltry 0.15 percent (Handy *et al.*, 1987). The situation is exacerbated by the fact that in Britain only 10 percent of managers have a qualification related to the industry and 94 percent of those in the industry have no recognised qualification. It is thus not surprising that in Britain very low priority is given to education and training (Keep, 1990). It is equally not surprising that

South African and Australian newspapers periodically have advertisements in them which attempt to coax newly graduated hospitality students to British pubs and other service industry businesses. The British hospitality industry is certainly not worth looking to for guidance.

If South Africa wishes to become competitive in the hospitality and tourism arena it is necessary to consider what has been done and what has been proven to work in this regard. Sovilla and Varty (2004, 3), state that the main mission of cooperative education is to enhance student learning, which suggests that the quality of teaching that is provided is of paramount importance. Cates and Jones (1999) also suggest that cooperative education should be a highly structured educational strategy that scaffolds learning and integrates academic study with learning through creative work experiences in the field related to a student's career.

The German example is one which can provide us with guidelines as to how to implement an effective experiential learning encounter for our learners who have set their hearts on a career in the wonderful world of hospitality service provision. Each of the relevant stake-holders i.e. the learners, the educators and the 'employers' need to buy in to the concept of excellence in experiential learning encounters. Only in this way can the demand from the industry for efficient and effective employees be adequately supplied. It is just not good enough for certain 'employers' to 'dump' learners behind a front-office desk for the entire period of their experiential learning encounter. This will de-motivate the learners and drive them away from an industry that is crying out for skilled employees. The industry owes it to itself to make experiential learning encounters as attractive as possible to its potential future full-time employees. Learners could be placed on experiential

learning encounters after consultation between themselves and their parents (assuming they are minors), hotel school educators and administrators, an industry representative and a trade union representative. This collaborative decision-making would decrease the likelihood of dissatisfaction by the learner. While on experiential learning the learner is still a student of the hotel school and remains responsible to it.

The German Scenario

Germany has a highly reputable and efficient vocational education and training system in place which is worth investigating and learning from. Germany's tradition goes back to the mediaeval guild training in craft and merchant trades. As industrialization increased during the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century, this mode of training was adopted by the new trades including hospitality and related service industries. Since the twentieth century, this form of training has become common practice in many occupational areas. Individualized learning is undertaken and students make further progress as skills and competencies are obtained. The apprentices are taught that accuracy is more important than speed and they are given time to grasp difficult skills in spaced learning which is in a sequence of skill development.

By law all businesses must register with the local chamber (*Kammer*) and pay an appropriate fee. Most Hotels and service industry providers register with the *Industrie-und Handelskammer* (Chamber of Industry and Commerce). There are also chambers for the medical and agricultural professions. No firm is obliged to provide training but it is well known that most companies agree to this because they realize that it is good for them and for the country as a whole to have a better equipped workforce in dealing with domestic and foreign customers. In 1992, there were some 2.5 million

companies including many hotel groups. About one fifth were accredited with training status. These companies accounted for the training of 1 700 000 apprentices. Firms provide vocational training at their own expense and are more often than not motivated by a sense of social responsibility. The sought employability skills must be embedded in all modules throughout the curriculum and reinforced at all levels so that they become part and parcel of the students mindset (Hind et al., 2007). The apprentices are paid an appropriate wage and companies receive no financial inducements. In 1992 the average nett cost of on-the-job training was about DM 18 000 for each trainee per year (International Report on German Education, 1995).

Berufsschulen are the backbone of Germany's vocational education system. These offer full-time one, two or three year courses and are suitable where trainees are unable to find a suitable training contract such as in times of recession. These are smaller than the traditional South African Hotel Schools and are more specialized. They are similar to cookery schools.

Berufsfachschulen are different to *Berufsschulen*. These are full-time vocational schools which offer a wide range of courses in the world of work and prepare learners for apprenticeships controlled by the Chambers of Industry and Commerce. These accounted for 253 000 German learners in 1992. Learners who already in possession of vocational training or have been employed for several years can attend *Berufsaufbauschulen* on a part-time basis. In these schools they are provided with a broad general and vocational education as they do not have the equivalent *Realschule* leaving certificate which is the requirement for entry to many courses at *Berufsfachshule*, *Fachoberschule* or a *Fachgymnasium*. In a fulltime capacity this education takes one year

and provides the learner with the *Mittlerer Schulabschluss*. *Fachoberschulen* are the technical secondary schools covering grades 11 and 12. These require learners to have a *Realschule* leaving certificate and offer practical training in a trade. Training takes place four days a week while the fifth day is reserved for general education as such. There are distinct *Fachoberschulen* for the domestic sciences and hospitality related areas. *Berufliches Gymnasiums* are the upper levels of a *Gymnasium* which are highly technical orientated (International Report on German Education, 1995).

Higher Education institutions in Germany are self-governing bodies which are incorporated under public law and maintained by the *Länder*. Courses may culminate at a master's degree or diploma after four to five years. Learners can shape their own course around a recommended curriculum and interim examinations are obligatory. Learners can study at their own pace. Learners can either study fulltime or simultaneously while apprentices in a hospitality service provider's business. Trainees from any schooling system as mentioned above are placed on an 'apprenticeship' in a hotel, for example, and are paid rates which are negotiated at the national level. While at the hotel they are trained in line with carefully developed national curricula and the hotel also provides training of a theoretical nature to bolster what the learners have been taught at their tertiary education institution. Clearly not all hotels have the human or material resources to conduct such training (National Council for Vocational Awards, 1992). It is therefore necessary to have external help in some cases. The 69 local Chambers of Industry and Commerce play a vital role in meeting the needs of the less able establishments. What they do is underpinned by federal law (Hardy *et al*, 1987). The Chambers also have distinct aims and objectives which may

vary from region to region. Businesses are required to register as a "training company" with the Chamber of Industry and Commerce closest to them, geographically speaking that is (Ibid). The tertiary institutions remain the main educator of the learners in terms of all the academic learning which is indispensable and at least a fair measure of practical skill development in the kitchen for example. Students learn and develop their skills best by actual hands-on experiences and do very well when they see progress being made. This stimulates greater interest in learning more but no diversity training is provided as the society has evolved and people accept each other as individuals.

It is the Chambers which organize and assess the final examinations of the learners and which ultimately award the vocational qualifications the learners obtain. They in fact regulate the accreditation and examining of all trainees. The German *Länder* or regional states are entirely responsible for vocational training at the school and college levels. It is however the federal government which is responsible for vocational training beyond the school and college levels. This would include on-the-job training as prescribed by the German Vocational Training Act of 1969. The Act was re-written in 1991 and places greater emphasis on quality issues, finance, structure, employment and regulation aspects in vocational education and training. It now also includes employers' organisations and trade union representatives as well as members of the Chambers of Industry and Commerce and describes incentives for employers involved in vocational training and education. The incentives have also made the industry invest in in-house education and training and many hotel groups now seek consultants to help retrain their older employees in the latest trends and technology.

The key to success in Germany is the total commitment of 'employers' to training and their willingness to pay for training. Many hotel groups will even train a greater number of learners than they actually need for their own operations. They pay their learners a higher salary than one would expect and readily form partnerships with tertiary institutions that are able to provide them with the necessary human material. The trade unions of the hospitality industry are also very involved in facilitating the effective experiential encounter of learners. They convene meetings between the relevant stakeholders and make certain that learners are not exploited or abused by the business which is 'employing' them. The training skills in Germany are of a high standard but she lacks adequate assessment skills for the learners in hospitality. In the arena of craft industry, Germany remains the leader. Her system relies on a highly developed infrastructure and skills are passed on to young learners via the master craftsmen in each field. The theoretical knowledge base is provided by tertiary institutions. The problem however lies in the workplace assessment of learners. This is not entirely adequate. It is nonetheless clear that sanitation and personal hygiene and grooming issues are important in especially hospitality training.

The Lesson

If South Africa were to emulate the German system, we could contract unions and SETAs such as CATHSSETA to help our Hotel Schools and other tertiary institutions to assess the learners on a more frequent basis. South Africa trade unions could also become partners in financing the education of learners together with industry. Collective agreements could be put into place in which for example for every rand earned by a learner, five cents could be put into a special fund for training and retraining as in the United States

(Department of Education and Science, 1990). The Department of Education (DoE) of South Africa, report 151 (2004:190-192), states that the National Diploma in Hospitality Management in South Africa must include at least six months WIL in order for it to be officially recognized by the South African Qualifications Authority as having any credence. Drahosz (2010) states that any form of mentorship, coaching and/or training needs to be fully sustained by an effective mentoring plan which will set out the precise order of events which should occur and which are necessary to skill the students being taught in the workplace.

In their WIL period students could be assessed by at least three of the following relevant stakeholders who each produce an independent report on the students' progress and suitability for graduation:

Ongoing assessment by the tertiary education provider

Trade Union representatives who are qualified Assessors

An industry representative as an experiential learning adviser

Meaningful monitoring by an appropriate member of the service industry business in which the learner is placed by the education provider

Learners would be required to pass each assessment before graduating from the tertiary education provider institution. The rapidly developing hospitality industry in South Africa desperately requires quality employees. If industry does not address the necessary changes in the apparent mind-set of certain service providers, there is bound to be a decline in the number of learners enrolling for hospitality careers. This will not bode well for an industry which requires a consistently high standard of service quality in order to remain

truly competitive in the global arena. Eraqi (2006) discovered that the effective development of all employees' empowerment and the autonomy they are given are indeed important in the quest to provide quality tourism services including hospitality services.

If competencies such as interpersonal skills, service provision, teamwork, communication, quality focus and problem solving skills are developed and improved value will be added to the students' intellectual capabilities and this will in turn make them far more likely to be employed (Hind et al., 2007). According to Hillman (2010) the careful development of a mentoring plan can greatly augment the sense of personal control that both employer and employee have or may need. These plans should essentially be a systematic way through which the expectations of both parties can be thrashed out, for example, the times for regular meetings-monthly, weekly or daily and the issues that need to be discussed.

Long working hours, low salaries if any at all, and a lack of adequate career planning all tend to de-motivate learners (Getz, 1994). If we wish to avoid a decline in the number of employees in the hospitality industry and be faced with a temporary workforce that is ill-equipped to make our industry competitive we need to act now. If the number of jobs is not equaled by the manpower supply, we face a demographic disaster (Lucas & Jeffries, 1993).

It is abundantly clear in media reports and industry related academic journals that both the workplace and technology are in a constant state of flux. Consequently, employees both old and new must be flexible in both their mindset and ability and be able to adapt themselves to new technologies as quickly as possible so as to be able to provide required service.

Diversity training in WIL

According to Loden and Rosener in the book *Workforce America*, Diversity defined in terms of primary and secondary dimensions includes age, ethnicity, gender, physical ability/qualities, race, and sexual/affectional orientation. These six dimensions serve as interdependent core elements which shape the basic self-image of individuals and which shape their fundamental world view. There are also secondary dimensions that can be changed and which include inter-alia educational background, geographic location, socio-economic status, marital status, religious beliefs, work experience, etc. These dimensions affect our self-esteem and help define who we are as individuals and they "add complexity to the way we see ourselves and others; they do not usually change our fundamental core identity" (Loden and Rosener, 1999). If we are to prepare students to be educated to be good future employees and model citizens, we cannot ignore the issue of cultural diversity (Lister, 2003). Diversity management should typically includes the following (Mok, 2002): "The explicit recognition of the strategic importance of employee and customer diversity by top management, ensuring that all human resource management systems (e.g., recruitment, selection, orientation, training and development, rewards systems, communication strategies) are supportive of employee diversity and consistent with applicable legislation (e.g., local labour laws, human rights)".

Given South Africa's racial past it is very necessary to examine the context of diversity and analyze lecturer and mentor preparation to handle students in a diverse workplace. More support for diversity should exist. It is essential that more diversity issues be discussed in case studies during lectures at university and that WIL visits with a cultural diversity

component in mind be conducted on a more frequent basis than is currently the case. A more reflective and critical perspective is required concerning diversity in the workplace (Mok, 2002). Both lecturers and mentors should not bring their own biases into the classroom and workplace respectively. Workplace mentors should also promote diversity issues. Workshops during the course of an academic year would be useful to create more comfort between students from different backgrounds and races etc and would also serve their future careers in good stead. Cultural attitudes are to a large extent affected by experience and age (Senge, 2006). WIL models should be reconsidered to accommodate cultural diversity as only such education will create empowerment and improve a student's capacity to deal with cultural diversity issues as and when they arise. WIL workplaces must collaborate with universities and also learn to transform themselves in response to the external environment within which they operate and provide meaningful cross-cultural training experiences for students undergoing WIL. Students must also examine the assumptions and beliefs on which their behavior and attitudes are based and they should question themselves. There are many challenges and opportunities for training culturally skilled hospitality industry employees and lecturers and mentors have the power to influence race and other relations in a very positive way (Christou, 2000). Students as future employees must be provided with the tools to understand their role in their everyday work.

The training of students in cultural diversity issues must be an ongoing process. Lecturers and employers must collaborate to create the opportunity to develop a wider range of skills within the workplace for students, including cultural diversity skills so as to enrich the workplace and society in general. Most hospitality employees do not possess a firm

grasp of diverse cultures, because they are only familiar with the very basics of diversity. This situation often leads to working by trial and error that creates operational inefficiencies, competitive disadvantage and a myriad of lost opportunities. This is especially the case in a transforming society such as South Africa.

The value of industry involvement in learner education is priceless to the welfare of the industry itself. By aiding the education provider, industry will not find any mismatches between what it needs and what education provides. Learners who have 'meaningful' experiential learning encounters are more self-disciplined and self-confident. They also tend to be far more motivated and are realistic in their expectations of the industry. Their time-management skills are greatly enhanced if they have been provided with a 'meaningful' experiential encounter. Problem-solving and people skills are highlighted by 'hands on' encounters. While hospitality educators deliver the core competencies required by the industry, it is industry which broadens these skills providing that learners are viewed as a necessity rather than a burden. Industry and education providers need to work more closely with each other in developing placement opportunities in economically challenging times.

The huge skills gap and the reputation of the industry can only be improved by a concerted and sustained effort by especially industry to play its meaningful role in preserving itself (Swan, 2002). Goodyear (2006) alludes to the fact that mentoring is an accommodating relationship between caring individuals who possesses specialized knowledge and who are able to share their experience and wisdom with others they are nurturing and which results in personal and career advancement.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that industry would benefit far more if it were cognisant of the vast potential and opportunity offered by its needed greater investment in time and money to experiential learning encounters. It needs to become more actively involved in developing what it perceives to be training requirements and realize that both education providers and it have a responsibility for a quality experiential learning encounter for each learner seeking a lifelong career in the hospitality industry (Sloan, 2002). It is clear that all employers are expecting to employ graduates who are already well educated and work-ready and they thus demand a wide range of competencies, skills and desired qualities from them (Yorke & Harvey, 2005). Not only does WIL teach students skills in-house so to speak, but it also gives them an opportunity to apply the often abstract concepts which they have learned in the lecture room.

The education providers and industry also need to co-operate in a drive to increase awareness of what the industry offers in terms of a career. It is not a career path for academic dropouts as some tend to believe. Hospitality is a vibrant and dynamic industry but it is not for the squeamish or faint-hearted. It requires commitment and dedication. Industry could in this regard aid academic institutions in selecting and accepting suitable candidates as potential students. To put it simply, Industry has the power to make or break the learner whom it needs to employ. If industry wants people with imagination, passion and the 'right' attitude, it must help in the process and motivate young learners to remain delighted in their chosen career paths. All Higher Education institutions which offer hospitality programs must make certain that they have the required

infrastructure in terms of their physical facilities that will allow for the effective teaching of all needed and desired technical skills. Whether working at the front office, guest relations, marketing, food and beverage department, housekeeping or other area, new employees must all have the required skills to make themselves more sought after. Those with multi-skill ability will be most desired by an employer. The technical skills learned during WIL must be immediately transferrable to the real world of work by the students (Fleming & Eames, 2005).

Managers in industry with acumen and a keen business focus will tend to build the relationships between themselves and learners while on experiential learning encounters. Industry can also encourage research in the area of experiential learning. Academics have a different perspective on hospitality and could be encouraged by industry to enhance their perspective on the industry. Educators would gladly respond to an industry which demonstrates its willingness to enhance all education in the service provision arena. A cohesive approach which is apparent in Germany would be to the benefit of all. The industry is highly labour-intensive and very customer focused and quality service provision is non-negotiable. The top notch service quality provision in German hotels speaks volumes for the methodology they employ to be the best that they can be.

Whatever training program is developed for the hospitality industry it must emphasize the skills and knowledge that relates to the handling of and orientation towards hospitality customers. This is arguably the most important skill required today and is a huge challenge in South Africa. The hospitality industry is also highly diverse, and whether it be food service operations or lodging, it has great needs in terms of employee requirement. Effective training

provides a means to develop useful employees who are fully productive. Whatever training is undertaken must however be viewed as an ongoing process in a hospitality operation but this requires the commitment of management as they seek to develop and essentially maintain the highest possible levels of employee competence. Whether seeking culinary excellence or other skills, higher education institutions offering hospitality qualifications must provide relevant education and training and carefully use WIL in concert with industry to delineate their traditional student profile. As the industry continues to grow and more students are accepted for relevant programs, WIL will need to include a far greater level of competence building to drive the tourism industry to new heights and to allow the country to gain a competitive advantage.

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