

Synergies of research, design-based education and industry collaboration: a dialogue with Marco ten Hoor, Academy Director of the Hotel Management School Leeuwarden

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ABSTRACT: This edited transcript documents a dialogue between Rodney Westerlaken, Editor-in-Chief of *Research in Hospitality Management*, serving as host, and Marco Ten Hoor, Academy Director of the Hotel Management School Leeuwarden. The conversation explores multifaceted dimensions of the hospitality sector, encompassing the changing landscape of education, the influence of research, and the urgent research imperatives arising from contemporary global circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The conversation offers valuable insights into the future trajectory of hospitality education and research, emphasising the pivotal role of synergistic partnerships between academia and industry. Furthermore, it underscores the significance of harnessing emerging technologies as catalysts for innovation in the industry.

Introduction

In this inaugural edition of our journal's new segment¹, where we embark on insightful conversations with prominent stakeholders, researchers and practitioners in the field of hospitality management,¹ we had the privilege of hosting Marco ten Hoor, Academy Director of the Hotel Management School in Leeuwarden. We explore Marco's perspectives on research at the Hotel Management School and in the broader industry, shedding light on the symbiotic relationship between academic inquiry and the dynamic realm of hospitality.

Rodney Westerlaken (RW): As the inaugural guest, we have Marco ten Hoor, Academy Director of the Hotel Management School in Leeuwarden. To kick off our conversation, perhaps you could introduce yourself further.

Marco ten Hoor (Mth): Yes, my name is Marco ten Hoor, and for the past six years, I have served as the Academy Director of the Hotel Management School of NHL Stenden here in Leeuwarden. I have been involved in education for nearly 20 years, previously working in the industry. I am proud and honoured to be part of this esteemed school.

RW: In this interview, we aim to explore the integral role of research in hospitality, leisure and tourism. Understanding this context is crucial for examining your perspective on the synergy between academic inquiry and the dynamic nature of hospitality. Firstly, what are your thoughts on the unique aspects of the design-based education concept within our academy and research?

Mth: The significance of design-based education lies in its seamless integration of industry into both the curriculum and research components. This holistic approach ensures that students are equipped not only with theoretical knowledge but also with practical skills essential for their future roles as hospitality leaders. By incorporating real-world challenges provided by the industry, students are continually exposed to the latest developments, preparing them effectively for their career paths. However, while design-based education has made strides in aligning with industry needs, there remains a crucial aspect to address: the translation of research findings into tangible applications. This bridge between research and practice is vital for enhancing students' abilities to analyse and innovate, ultimately driving impactful solutions in the hospitality sector.

In essence, design-based education serves as a cornerstone for the future, nurturing a mindset of constant learning and adaptation. Through its fusion of industry engagement and research exploration, it empowers students to navigate the complexities of their field with confidence and agility. However, ongoing efforts are necessary to ensure that research insights are effectively translated into practical outcomes, thus maximising the programme's potential for both students and the industry at large.

RW: Striking a balance between academia and industry relevance is crucial. Which of the active research groups at the school is your favourite?

Mth: I have a strong affinity for hospitable behaviour, as I believe it is a timeless aspect of the hospitality industry that will always hold significance. However, alongside this, I recognise the critical importance of sustainability in today's world.

Sustainability has become a paramount concern and is a topic that demands attention.

When our hotel management school initially addressed sustainability, it was primarily about raising awareness. I believe our focus should shift towards leveraging research to implement practical solutions. While awareness has spread widely, we must now concentrate on utilising the tools and insights garnered from research to enact meaningful change.

I am particularly intrigued by the aspect of disruptors in the industry, an area spearheaded by our new professor, Ian Yeoman. The recognition of disruptors and emerging phenomena is crucial as it allows us to anticipate and adapt to unforeseen challenges. Research plays a pivotal role in this process, enabling us to effectively identify and prepare for future disruptions.

Ultimately, my passion lies in nurturing talent and grooming future leaders through a combination of learning principles and cutting-edge research. While hospitable behaviour remains close to my heart, I recognise the interconnectedness of various aspects in the hospitality realm and the necessity of addressing contemporary challenges head-on.

RW: *Speaking of change, can you elaborate on what the concept of "game changer" means to you?*

MtH: To me, the concept of a "game changer" signifies a fundamental need for transformation in hospitality education and industry practices. It is about recognising the imperative to adapt to emerging trends and navigate unforeseen disruptions, such as the profound impact of events like the COVID-19 pandemic. We must proactively anticipate and embrace change to maintain relevance and innovation in the industry.

When I assumed my role in 2018, I recognised the need to steer our hotel management school in a new direction. Traditional, static approaches were no longer sufficient in a rapidly evolving world. Hence, I coined "game changers" to encapsulate our strategic vision. This initiative aimed to raise awareness and catalyse tangible shifts in our curriculum and operational methodologies.

Little did I anticipate the magnitude of change that would unfold just months after launching our strategic plan, with the onset of a global pandemic. The crisis shattered preconceived boundaries and frameworks, compelling us to reassess and adapt at an unprecedented pace. It underscored the urgency of our mission to deliver a transformative impact in the hospitality industry. As an institution, we committed ourselves to fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability, engaging students in co-creating the next generation of hospitality solutions. Embracing design-based education proved instrumental in this endeavour, nurturing a mindset of creative problem-solving and forward-thinking.

Looking ahead, I focus on strengthening the connection between research and real-world applications. Too often, valuable research remains confined to academic areas, disconnected from practical implementation. I envision a curriculum where research permeates from the very beginning, instilling in students the understanding that research is not just a theoretical exercise, but a potent tool for effecting change.

I advocate for a more integrated and mandatory approach to research education to achieve this. Research should be viewed as indispensable, a cornerstone in developing the skills and mindset necessary to drive meaningful innovation and become true game changers in the industry.

RW: *How do you envision engaging with the hospitality industry through research?*

MtH: Engaging with the hospitality industry through research is vital for driving innovation and addressing contemporary challenges. Sustainability, for instance, is no longer just a topic, but an integral aspect that must be seamlessly integrated into every facet of industry operations. Research is pivotal in facilitating this integration, providing insights and solutions that propel the industry forward.

Looking beyond the local context, I envision a broader collaboration in research initiatives, expanding beyond individual institutions to form a cohesive global network. A unified research centre focused on hospitality, leisure and tourism.

However, integrating research into the curriculum presents a significant challenge. While the knowledge base is robust, it needs to be strengthened in its incorporation into educational frameworks. This entails a more active involvement of professors and senior researchers in teaching, ensuring that research principles are ingrained from the outset in students' education.

Moreover, practical application of research findings is essential. Utilising living labs such as our Notiz Hotel enables hands-on experimentation and collaboration with industry partners, fostering innovation and real-world solutions. This approach distinguishes us as an institution that is committed to bridging the gap between theory and practice.

As for my personal engagement with research in the hospitality industry, I emphasise the dedication and passion of our researchers when presenting our academy to external entities. Our research endeavours are not mere hobbies; they are driven by a genuine desire to contribute meaningfully to the industry. I highlight the transformative potential of research in shaping the future of hospitality, moving away from reactive decision-making towards proactive anticipation and adaptation. Ultimately, the concept of a "game changer" encapsulates our collective efforts to revolutionise the hospitality landscape through rigorous research and forward-thinking strategies.

RW: *Looking ahead, how do you see the future of our journal, Research in Hospitality Management?*

MtH: When considering the future of our *Research and Hospitality Management* journal, I focus on enhancing its accessibility and relevance to a broader audience, particularly in the industry. While the journal already upholds a high academic quality standard, I aim to bridge the gap between academia and practical application.

One key initiative in this regard is to make the journal's content more understandable and adaptable for external readers. This involves translating complex research findings into language that is accessible and comprehensible to industry professionals. Through efforts like this podcast interview, we are taking the first steps towards engaging a wider audience and making our research more relatable and impactful.

Moving forward, I envision our journal pivoting to showcase the remarkable work of our researchers to the world. By highlighting the quality and relevance of our research, we can attract more attention and recognition, ultimately making a tangible impact on the future of the hospitality industry.

In terms of specific goals or aspirations, my primary focus is on showcasing our research to the world. I believe that by sharing our insights and findings widely, we can foster greater collaboration and innovation in the industry. There are no

limitations on the topics or special issues; instead, the emphasis is on showcasing the excellence of our research and its potential to drive positive change in the world of hospitality.

RW: *Finally, do you have any closing thoughts or aspirations to share?*

MtH: I believe in the transformative power of research and its potential to drive positive change in the hospitality industry. We can create impactful solutions to industry challenges by fostering collaboration and innovation. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss these critical topics.

Note

- 1 This dialogue is also available as a podcast, providing deeper insights into the topic discussed. Listen at <https://open.spotify.com/episode/35I5GjFerT2HBjT0FaonsA?si=Oyxj63GYRsq--j134tsX4A>

