STOCKTON UNIVERSITY

LLOYD D. LEVENSON INSTITUTE
OF GAMING, HOSPITALITY & TOURISM
School of Business

Seeking Employment Solutions for the Gaming, Hospitality, and Tourism Industries of Atlantic County

May 2023

Jennifer L. Aarons, EdD
Fellow, Lloyd D. Levenson Institute of Gaming, Hospitality & Tourism
Teaching Specialist, Hospitality, Tourism & Event Management

Supported by:

Jane Bokunewicz, PhD
Faculty Director, Lloyd D. Levenson Institute of Gaming, Hospitality & Tourism
Professor, Hospitality, Tourism & Event Management

Summary

The hospitality and tourism industries continue to face employment challenges. It has been well-documented that these industries were hit the hardest during the COVID-19 pandemic and are still recovering. While the desire for travel by consumers has returned to pre-pandemic levels, businesses in hospitality and tourism continue to face an uphill battle regarding staffing. The hospitality and tourism businesses in Atlantic City and Atlantic County are recovering at a slower pace than the rest of New Jersey. The State of New Jersey reported an unemployment rate at the end of 2020 at 7.2%. This is over three points lower than the Atlantic City-Hammonton Metro Area, which was reported to be 10.8% for the same time period. At the end of 2022, the unemployment rate in New Jersey was 3.3% versus 4.5% in the Atlantic City-Hammonton Metro Area. Specific to the leisure and hospitality industry, the Atlantic City-Hammonton Metro Area employed over 39,600 at the end of 2019 before the pandemic and employed 35,400 by the end of 2022. While there has been significant improvement, this area continues to struggle.

Why is it so challenging for businesses in the hospitality and tourism industry to fill their open positions? This is a question that we at the Lloyd D. Levenson Institute for Gaming, Hospitality, and Tourism (LIGHT) sought to explore.

Methodology

From September until November 2022, we surveyed Human Resources professionals from the local casino and noncasino companies and Job Counselors from the One-Stop Career Center on this topic. The key data we investigated included:

- Number of open positions in key areas during peak and off-peak seasons
- Number of hires in key areas
- Identification of “Persistently Vacant Positions”
- Possible reasons that positions are not filled OR candidates are not hirable
- Hard and soft skills inventories

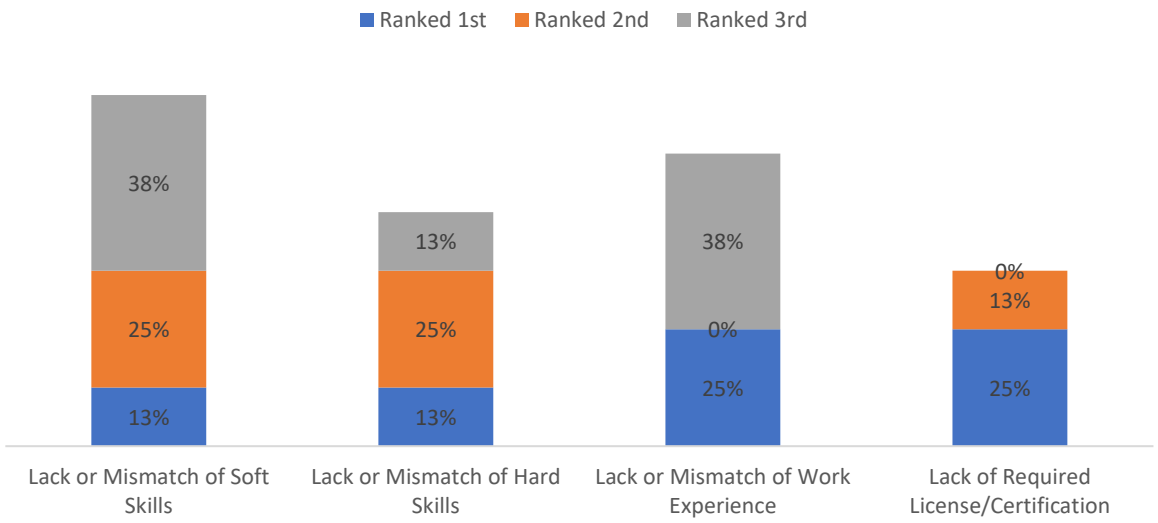
We received six completed surveys from Human Resources professionals and 11 completed surveys from Job Counselors. In February 2023, we held a Labor Summit that was open to professionals in the gaming, hospitality, and tourism industry. Following an inciteful panel discussion where panelists were asked several questions related to the survey, we asked all participants to break into small workgroups to discuss specific questions in greater detail. Through these workgroups, several themes and opportunities emerged.

Key Findings

What are the most common reasons a job seeker does not match an open gaming, hospitality, and tourism hourly position?

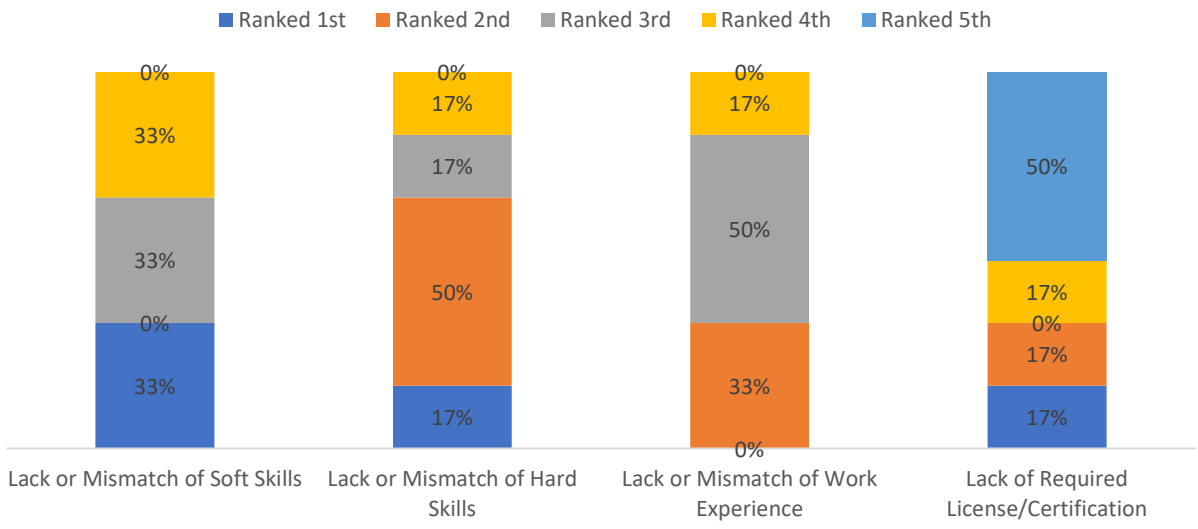
Job Counselor Responses

- 50% of Job Counselors stated that this is due to either a Lack or Mismatch of Work Experience or a Lack of Required License/Certification
- Over 60% of Job Counselors indicated that a secondary challenge is the Lack or Mismatch of Soft Skills/Hard Skills or the Lack of Required License/Certification



Human Resources Professionals' Responses

- Different from the Job Counselors, a Lack or Mismatch of Soft Skills was more impactful than Hard Skills or License/Certification
- Over 80% indicated that either the Lack or Mismatch of Hard Skills or Work Experience was the second most impactful reason for not hiring candidates.

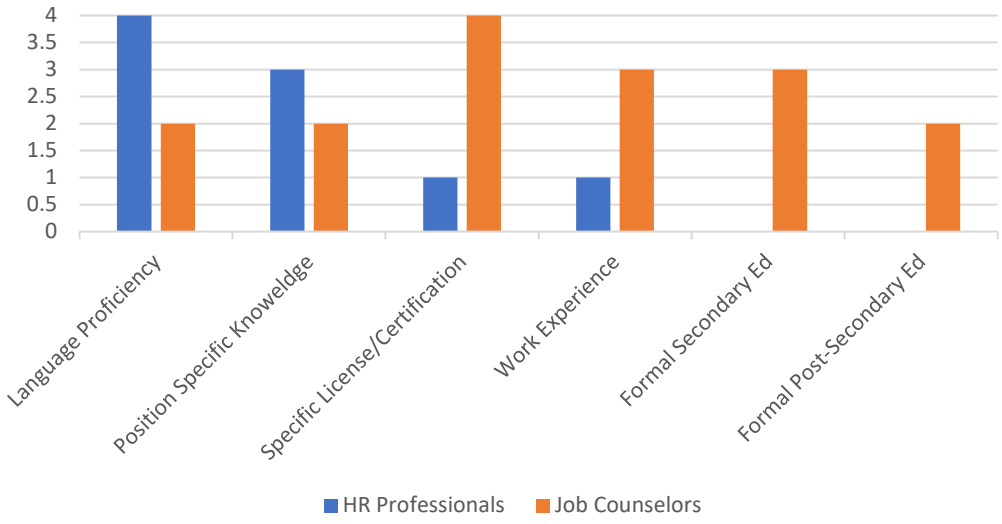


Are there specific positions/jobs that are persistently vacant?

Most Significant	2	3	4	Least Significant
Housekeeper	Casino Cage	Bartender	Front Desk Agent	Stewarding
Dealer	House Attendant	Security		Bar Porter
	Cook			Dishwasher
				Lifeguard
				Sales

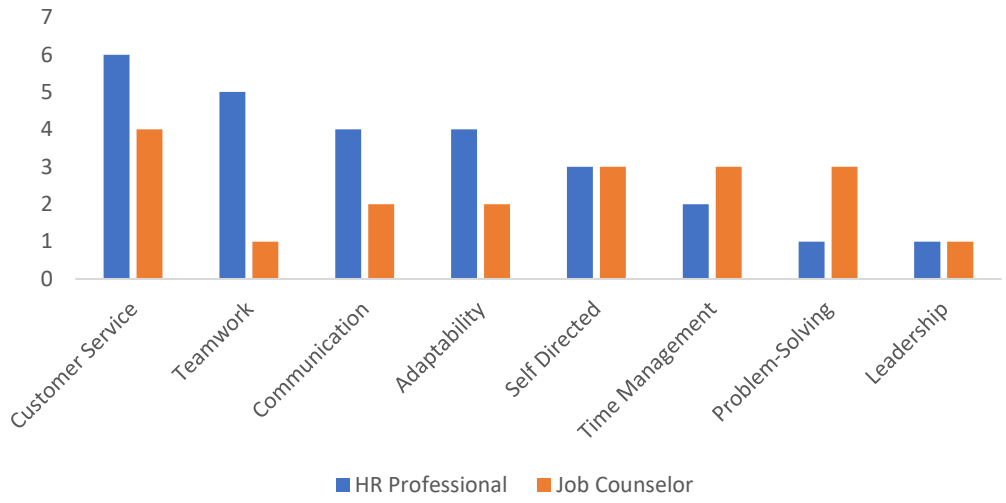
Human Resources Professionals ranked Housekeeper and Dealer as the most challenging positions to fill, closely followed by Casino Cage, House Attendant, and Cook. It is interesting to note that two of these positions (Dealer and Casino Cage) require specific licensing, a barrier identified as primary by Job Counselors but not by Human Resources Professionals.

When hiring for persistently vacant hourly positions, which of the following hard skills are most important in job candidates?



The results of this question demonstrate some disparity between the two groups. The Human Resources Professionals place greater emphasis on Language Proficiency and Position Specific Knowledge, whereas the Job Counselors ranked requirements for Specific License/Certification and Work Experience highest. This difference clearly shows that what Job Counselors are focusing on with job seekers is not what the industry desires.

When hiring for persistently vacant hourly positions, which of the following soft skills are most important in job candidates?



Here the results of the question regarding soft skills presented more consistencies than inconsistencies. Both groups ranked Customer Service skills as highly important for job candidates. Being Self-Directed and having good Time Management and Leadership skills were ranked similarly by each group. However, Teamwork, Communication, and Adaptability are more important to Human Resources Professionals. This represents a disconnect between what employers are seeking versus what job placement services are focusing on. With this information, job placement organizations can better tailor their training programs to better suit the needs of the industry.

Opportunities for Improvement

Analyzing the results of the surveys and the information gleaned from the labor summit workgroups, challenges and opportunities for all stakeholders were discovered. There is a disconnect between what the Human Resources Professionals identify as important skills versus the Job Counselors. This realization is important as these groups can work together to improve the employability of job seekers. Communication by the industry regarding exactly what skillsets and experience are required to the Job Counselors will benefit everyone. There are opportunities to establish partnerships between industry and job placement programs to help job seekers develop the skills necessary. The Workforce Development department has available funding for training programs that can be designed to meet the specific needs of the hospitality and tourism industry. As the labor pool continues to change, it will be incumbent upon industry leaders to explore new avenues to find employees. This presents opportunities for industry and job placement organizations to engage in partnerships to close these gaps.

For more information about this research, please contact LIGHT at 609.626.3859 or light@stockton.edu
For information on training programs with Workforce Development, please contact the Atlantic County Workforce Development Board at (609) 485-0153.