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COMMENTS AND REJOINDERS

Finding the Hospitality Industry (A Response to Paul Slattery)

Bob Brotherton (b.brotherton@mmu.ac.uk)

Manchester Metropolitan University

Old Hall Lane, Manchester, M14 6HR, UK.

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This response to Slattery's paper with the above title, published in Vol.1, No.1 (2002) of this journal, challenges his assertions that the fundamental ideas proposed in the work of Brotherton (1999) and Lashley and Morrison (2000) 'degrade the hospitality industry' and that the approach taken in this work is 'redundant for understanding the industry and as an effective basis for teaching and research in hospitality' (Slattery, 2002:19). However, I must make it clear that my response is not one articulated on behalf of the editors of, or other contributors to, the *In Search of Hospitality – Theoretical Perspectives and Debates* (Lashley and Morrison, 2000) text that constitutes the focus of Slattery's critique. Indeed, I do not entirely disagree with some of Slattery's criticisms concerning the 'three domains' approach. However, and particularly in relation to my 1999 work and that contributed to this text with my colleague Roy Wood (Brotherton and Wood, 2000), I must take issue with Slattery's interpretation of the views expressed in these pieces, and his assertions based on these.

Though I personally have reservations concerning the validity of the three domains model, particularly regarding the inclusion of the 'social domain' where I have considerable sympathy with Slattery's views, he appears to misunderstand the process through which the Lashley and Morrison (2000) text was produced and, as a consequence, the extent to which the contributing authors were guided by and/or support the three domains model advanced by the editors. Though meetings and discussions had taken place, involving some but not all of the contributing authors, prior to the production of the book in question the three domains model was not a product of this process and therefore not used as a theoretical or structural basis to inform the individual contributions. In this sense it was not an a priori influence on the authors' thinking. The model emerged from the editors' distillation of the contributions to the book and the extent to which other contributors, or wider constituencies, support this model is, I would suggest, highly variable. Therefore, to make the assumption that there is anything approaching a 'three domains school of thought' (in Slattery's words – the 'three-domainers'), subscribed to by many of the contributors is erroneous and an extrapolation too far. The unity of thought and teaching/research focus implied by Slattery simply does not exist.

Bob Brotherton is a Principal Lecturer in Hospitality Management in the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management at Manchester Metropolitan University. He is currently researching and trying to develop a 'General Theory of Hospitality'.

Slattery also contends via the use of highly selective quotes from Brotherton and Wood (2000) that the hospitality industry is explicitly excluded from the real world of evidence used to formulate a definition of hospitality because 'it is inconvenient to the development of their approach' (2002:22). This is patently untrue. The particular passage referred to by Slattery makes the point that to define hospitality purely from an industrial perspective would be one:

“...designed to simultaneously define both the concept of hospitality and the nature/parameters of the hospitality industry’ and that ‘a more effective and plausible strategy [would be to define] the concept of hospitality in terms of its generic qualities (i.e. those which relate to hospitality per se) as opposed to using the provision of commercial hospitality as a conceptual anchor.” (Brotherton and Wood, 2000:137)

Neither here, or elsewhere in the chapter is the hospitality industry or commercial hospitality excluded from the consideration of its generic qualities or the definitions of hospitality (which Slattery, incorrectly, states is ‘designed to accommodate all three domains’ (2002:22)) and the hospitality industry that emerge from this analysis. Furthermore, this generic perspective does not explicitly include recognition of the existence or validity of the social domain that Slattery assumes it does. Indeed there is no overt reference to a social domain in this work. Surely, generic means generic, and as such explicitly includes commercial hospitality within its remit!

Slattery also accuses the three-domainers (whoever they are!) of insisting that ‘hospitality is about providing accommodation, food and drink [and that] this locks them into a minimalist conception of hospitality based on subsistence and entails that customers are primarily motivated by tiredness, hunger and thirst’, and that this view tends to lead to a rather narrow conception of hospitality venues which are then excluded from the ‘scope of hospitality management teaching and research’ (2002:25). Again I cannot comment on behalf of other so-called three-domainers but this is certainly not true in the case of Brotherton and Woods’ (2000) work that explicitly states:

“...the term accommodation is used in a wider sense than that normally ascribed to it within the context of hospitality. Here it is used to refer to any accommodation, whether permanent or temporary, used to house the hospitality exchange. Clearly this usage of the term embraces both domestic and commercial premises and posits that hospitality occurs within the context of a place.” (Brotherton and Wood, 2000:142)

Though the latter point is made by Slattery he appears to have conveniently ignored the detail of this chapter! Indeed, the whole point he makes about the importance of recognising the range and diversity of venues where hospitality occurs in his ‘industry context’ section is explicitly recognised and called for in Brotherton and Woods’ work.

Slattery’s obsession with the unity of the three-domainers also limits the power of his analysis with respect to the distinction between hospitality and retailing in Brotherton and Woods’ work. Though I agree with much of what he says on this, again he clearly failed to fully read this work as we question the validity of terms such as ‘hospitality retailers’ and whether ‘take-away food and, more recently home delivery and/or home meal replacement, [should] be located within the domain of retailing rather than hospitality’ (Brotherton and Wood, 2000:153), this being a perspective Slattery agrees with strongly. Indeed, contrary to the impression given, there is a remarkable similarity between some of the views expressed by Slattery and those previously advanced by Brotherton and Wood (2000)!

Finally, Slattery concludes by contending that:

“...by focussing on the process of exchange in hospitality the three-domainers exclude the industrial and corporate contexts of hospitality [and] have produced a sterile conception of hospitality and a radically inaccurate conception of the hospitality industry’ [and that] ‘the more that hospitality management academics focus on the range and structure of the hospitality business and how they can solve problems

within its contexts....they will be better able to prepare graduates with more effective conceptual understandings of the industry and to focus on research activities that contribute to the development of the industry". (2002:27)

This does seem to be a rather strange conclusion in that the heart of any hospitality business is the exchange that takes place in the provision/consumption of hospitality and it is the quality of this that ultimately drives customer satisfaction, loyalty, profitability and performance. Similarly, surely the application of scholarly thought and research activities, derived from a less introspective perspective, to the industry's problems is more likely to produce graduates capable of generating more innovative and radical solutions to many of these problems. The very type of people Slattery has elsewhere argued (Hamelin, 1999) are required to release the enormous growth potential embodied in the international hotel industry!

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