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Hospitality Management: Learning, Doing, Knowing

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On the first day of my *HF 100 Introduction to Hospitality Management* class I present a lecture that raises the question, "How Do You Teach Hospitality?" It's my first Power Point slide and is then repeated as my last slide for the day. I suspect (maybe hope) that this question is at the front of the minds of the thousands of people who daily think about hospitality education, training, management and leadership.

In his book, Setting the Table, restaurant icon Danny Meyer (2006) notes that his company, Union Square Hospitality Group, looks to hire individuals he calls the "51-percenters." These are people who show a positive balance of 51 to 49 percent between emotional skills and technical excellence. The five core emotional skills which USHG looks for are: Optimistic Warmth; Intelligence (defined as insatiable curiosity); Work Ethic; Empathy; and Self-Awareness/Integrity. He notes that:

> *Emotional skills are harder to assess, and it's usually necessary to spend meaningful time with people—often in the work environment—to determine whether or not they are a good fit. But it's critical to begin by being explicit about which emotional skills you are seeking.*

It should come as no surprise that emotional skills are not easily imbedded in a modern university business curriculum, which is the academic realm where Hospitality Management programs most often reside. Yet many hospitality management students appear to bring with them a tacit knowledge of these emotional skills when they begin their studies. After more than three decades of watching hospitality students mature I would say that they certainly exhibit strong emotional skills when they head out for a new career. Where then does this knowledge, or alternately, way of knowing, come from?

Is there something distinct about the traditional Hospitality Management curriculum? First offered in 1893 at the Ecole Hoteliere Lausanne in Switzerland and launched in the United States at The School of Hotel Administration at Cornell University in 1922, has this course of study evolved over time to focus on both of Meyer's skills – originally based on technical skills but now transforming to emotional skills?

A good place to start our inquiry may be to determine this: is Hospitality Management an academic discipline, suggesting it is something which can be codified, written down, and learned by *explicit* means? Or as some educators note, is it better described as a field of study which dwells in the realm of *tacit* learning and requires extensive personal contact, experience and observation but may not be adequately articulated by verbal means? How is knowledge managed by teachers, practitioners and students of the industry?

Next we should consider how innovation is applied in the practice and study of hospitality. Is the industry built on the *sustaining* innovation of measured small improvements in quality and process or on the *disruptive* innovative introduction of completely new products and services unlike any others which have come before?

On another dimension, we must add a component on the process of thinking and decision-making in hospitality management. Which parts of the business are more intuitive, *heuristic*

and built on gut-feeling and which are more *iterative*, objective and built on quantitative data analysis?

And a fourth area may be included, how students and practitioners learn. For example, at which point in the education process is it more desirable to have a *convergent*, fact-based and systematic perspective leading to a single solution, and which point is more likely to reward a *divergent*, multiple-option perspective where there may be more than one creative or "correct" answer?

This paper presents a model using each of these well-regarded theoretical constructs in an attempt to advance the discussion and answer the question, "How *do* you teach hospitality?"

Tacit and Explicit Knowledge

Michael Polanyi (1958, 1966) suggested that knowledge could be segmented into two different realms, tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge. His seminal work focused on tacit knowledge and "tacit knowing" which he suggested requires a personal involvement at the individual level of learning. Tacit knowledge is acquired in a non-verbal, observant or experience-based way. It is the knowledge where "we know more than we can tell" to others, or possibly even to ourselves. Harry Collins (2010) expanded the definition of tacit knowledge to include three areas, one involving the relational nature of human social life, one including the autonomic nature of the body and one in the collective nature of society.

Common examples used by both men to explain tacit knowledge include learning to ride a bicycle or to play piano – thinking about the details of the process often leads to not being able to perform at all. Reading a book about riding a bicycle will not lead to winning the Tour de France nor will a manual about finger placements in C# scales turn one into Vladimir Horowitz, no matter how long the study. But months riding a bike through the French Alps with a professional coach or taking a Master Class with a professional musician may in fact lead to personal success. Observing the "embodied knowledge" of experts in a manner which involves personal contact, regular interaction and trust may create tacit knowledge in the observer.

While tacit knowledge is non-verbal, practical and experience based, explicit knowledge is articulated, codified, and language based. It is more deductive and logical. Another characteristic of explicit knowledge is that it can be collected in a single place to be accessed by both individuals and groups (a library, Wikipedia, or a smartphone app should come to mind).

Tacit knowledge is the accumulation of individual "know-how" while explicit knowledge is the fact-based aggregation of shared "know-that." Collins points out that tacit knowledge is a prerequisite for explicit knowledge, you need to know something before you can explain what it is that you know. Yet the powerful human tendency to share our knowledge, to write things down, to articulate the non-verbal lesson is at the heart of all education, and is also the driver for automation, digitalization and emerging artificial intelligence technology.

Students who are enrolled in an introductory Culinary Arts program preparing menus of standard recipes from the Professional Chef textbook can be said to be using the explicit knowledge of cooks. Students who are engaged in a rotational Stage with the chef at a 3-star Michelin restaurant who exhibits grace and timing under pressure are mostly experiencing tacit

knowledge. Both types of knowledge are necessary in learning to be a cook, one articulated and one individually experienced.

Sustaining and Disruptive Innovation

Dr. Clayton Christianson originally proposed the popular management theory of "Disruptive Innovation" in a 1995 Harvard Business School article. He clearly owes a large debt to Joseph Schumpeter (1942) and the concept of capitalism being built on "creative destruction." The current model presents a framework for the creative process in business formation and innovation. Christianson lays out the differences between the iterative improvement he terms sustaining innovation and the discontinuous offering of the next new thing he terms disruptive innovation.

Sustainers are the well established and typically market dominating major players in an industry. They maintain their leadership position by keying on the needs of their best and most profitable customers. They accomplish this by seeking continuous improvement of products and services they already have on offer. There are many observers who rightly point out that this form of innovation has a significant track record of success, the "standing on the shoulders of giants model" of accretive progress.

The disruptors in business thrive most often when they are technically simpler, cheaper, faster or easier than the established previous generation of products and services they aim to replace. The risk is that these same attributes are often also of inferior quality and therefore have a short, volatile, and vain-glorious impact on the industry they seek to change. But it is the disruptors, like a thunderstorm providing both the destructive potential of a lightning strike and the torrential rain that leads to new growth, who give us the energy to renew and revitalize an industry.

The incumbents maintain their market positions when customers are seeking incremental innovations to existing products or services that are already perceived as being of higher quality. These sustaining innovations are often associated with the phrase "new and improved" although by definition nothing can truly be both new and improved. In many cases step-wise improvements are more likely to find market acceptance than the disruptive newcomers, though the "blue ocean" mindset does keep the capital markets constantly looking for the next new thing just over the horizon.

In business education and practice much has been made of the process of Total Quality Management or the principles of Six Sigma. The step-wise improvement known as the Deming Cycle is another example of the application of sustaining innovation in the classroom. The disruptive innovation of Strategic Management, Principles of Social Media Marketing, or the study of charismatic Leadership styles, all where the new is a positive addition to the topics, also fit well in the Hospitality Management curriculum.

Heuristic and Iterative Thinking

The Nobel laureate economist, Daniel Kahneman, wrote *Thinking Fast and Slow* (2011) to detail the different modes of thinking used by humans, modes that he termed System 1 or "Fast Thinking" and System 2 or "Slow Thinking."

Fast thinking is automatic, intuitive and associative. The process comes to the surface in the human tendency to create heuristic mental programs based on previous experiences, rubrics or tested frameworks. An Affect Heuristic decision is made quickly using judgments based on little more than feelings of liking or disliking the object or situation. An Availability Heuristic is quickly made on the desire to find meaning and patterns using information fit into the immediate present situation. In both cases the mind finds a best decision by rapidly relying on relevant past experiences or situations that seem familiar and similar to other successful past decisions.

Slow thinking is controlled, iterative, systematic, or what Kahneman termed "statistical." This is the decision-making style where thinking about a topic requires attention to detail, focus, and a narrow field of vision. Each new decision, and the thoughts associated with it, is built on the structures of previous decisions in an arduous step-wise process. Slow thinking can be easily disrupted when attention spans are cut short, but it is the balancing counterweight which keeps humans from acting impetuously or in an antisocial manner.

Students in a course learning about Entrepreneurship may be called upon to work in small groups "brain-storming" new concepts for their final project. In another course they may be using business case studies where they will come to trust their gut feelings for identifying the best possible alternative from a broad selection of outcomes. First year students take Accounting 101 which then leads in year two to Accounting 201 and so on are engaged in an iterative learning process. A doctoral dissertation is the ultimate example of a controlled, systematic and step-wise model of new knowledge creation.

Convergent and Divergent Learning Perspectives

The theorist J.P. Guilford (1967) offered a general theory of human intelligence he named the Structure of Intellect. While this complex theory incorporates up to 150 dimensions, part of it describes the learning processes for reasoning and problem-solving, which he termed Convergent and Divergent production. People who solve problems via a convergent strategy are focused on finding a single correct answer (consider a question on a multiple choice test). In many situations, the convergent learner feels most comfortable in a traditional student/teacher role, with data and facts presented to finding one outcome, for example a single mathematical calculation. Convergent learners collect facts, often from a variety of sources, analyze the situation and seek to test for the best feasible or optimal solution.

In opposition to this pattern would be the divergent learner, one able to identify multiple possible options or solutions. Guilford was very interested in the creative process, which he saw as in the realm of divergent production. A divergent perspective might draw an individual to the arts and humanities, creative writing, or history (where multiple perspective need to work together to find broad solutions) as opposed to science, technology or math as a course of study.

For the Hospitality Management major, convergent production might be seen in fact-based introductory or survey courses, the proscriptive side of Hospitality Law, or in the financial skills associated with an MBA curriculum. The divergent production side might best be embedded in

courses with a fluid or "what if" set of answers, including Communications, the self-reflective analysis after an internship or work study program, and the group process.

The Amalgamated Model

In order to use these theories in a comprehensive way, an Amalgamated Model (Figure 1) can be formed into a rubric using each of the four key competencies on alternating sides of a two-by-two matrix. Knowledge is either **E**xplicit or **T**acit, Learning is **C**onvergent or **D**ivergent, Innovation is **S**ustaining or **D**isruptive, and Thinking is **H**euristic or **I**terative. The corresponding quadrants each then suggest a different means for evaluating a Hospitality Management curriculum.

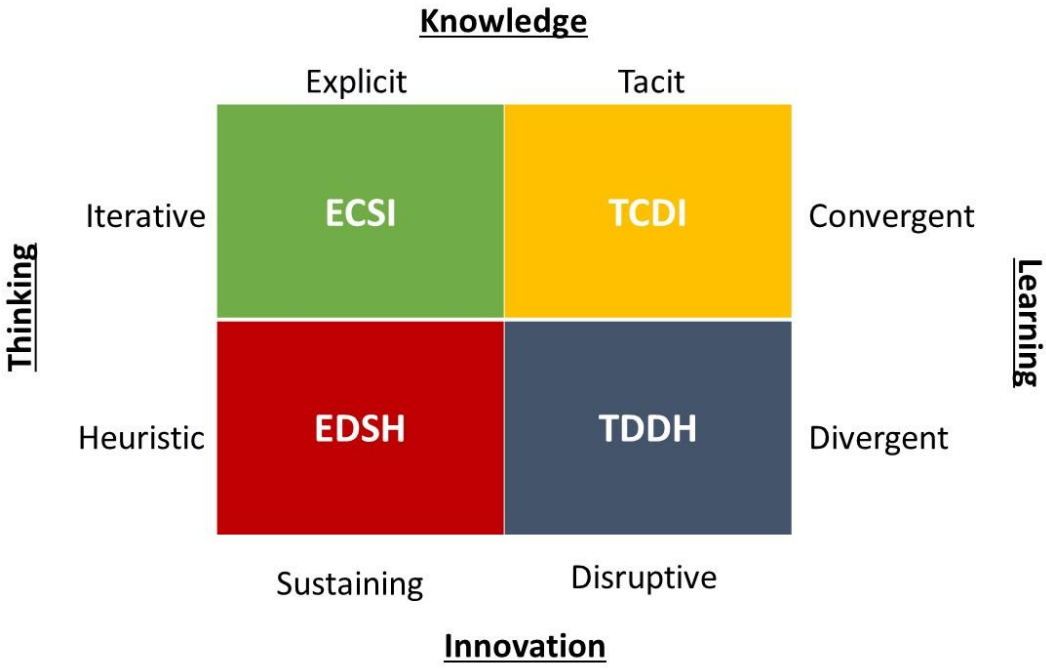

Figure 1. A Suggested Learning Rubric

The Quadrant Profile

Expanding on the basic model (Figure 2), each quadrant suggests a teaching/learning viewpoint with specific weight placed on different emotional and technical skills. The **ECSI** quadrant would reward a codified, focused, incrementally improved and statistical (slow) set of learning objectives. Quadrant two encompassing the **EDSH** attributes would look for codified, expansive/creative, incremental and intuitive (fast) offerings. The third Quadrant with a **TDDH** mix encourages learning in an experiential, expansive/creative, discontinuous new and intuitively fast manner. The final **TCDI** quadrant would involve an experiential, focused, discontinuous new and statistical (slow) combination.

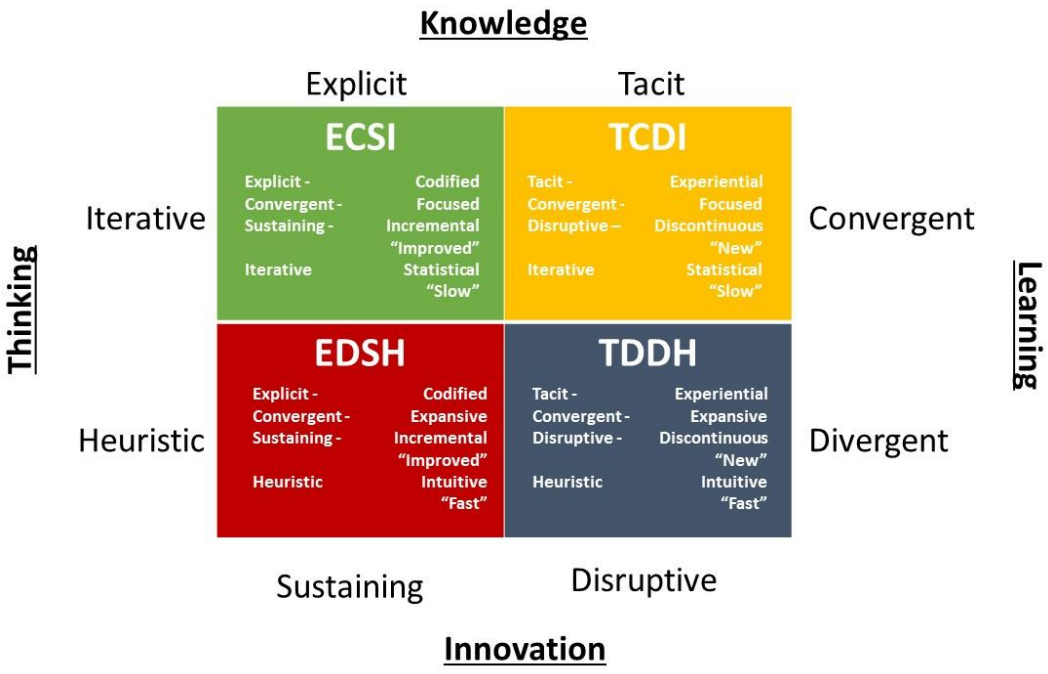

Figure 2. Characteristics

Application to the Hospitality Management Curriculum

If we consider the traditional Hospitality Management curriculum (Figure 3), both required and elective courses, and look at the entire range of educational levels, from undergraduate to doctoral studies, the Amalgamated Model can thus be helpful in creating a typology of course offerings.

Quadrant One (**ECSI)** concerns itself with student competence and technical skills, with courses that build on a core knowledge structure or discipline. Such classes as the Accounting sequence (Financial Accounting, Management Accounting, and Finance), or a Marketing sequence (Introduction to Marketing, Services Marketing, Advertising Communication, Consumer Behavior) fit well here. A case can be made that the core Master of Business Administration curriculum is also focused, stepwise, explicit and data based and is best located here.

Quadrant Two (**EDSH**) is more the domain associated with concept mastery, still using the accumulated articulated knowledge of specific topical information. The various work done in a kitchen or culinary class, based on the multitude of recipes and cookbooks can be exhibited here. But so can the explicit knowledge written down in the form of industry case studies, where students learn by creating their own system of decision-making heuristics.

In the third Quadrant (**TDDH**) the practical life experience which students bring with them to class gives them an opportunity to learn by doing. Experiential learning in the form of internships and work study, group projects and brain-storming new business concepts allows them to be creative in a business setting.

The final Quadrant (**TCDI**) is where students gain the focused perspective that enables a measure of expertise to develop. Whether at the elective/concentration level for undergraduates or the process of undertaking the years long process involved in doctoral studies, this is the time when data and hypotheses are tested, and preconceived notions are challenged.

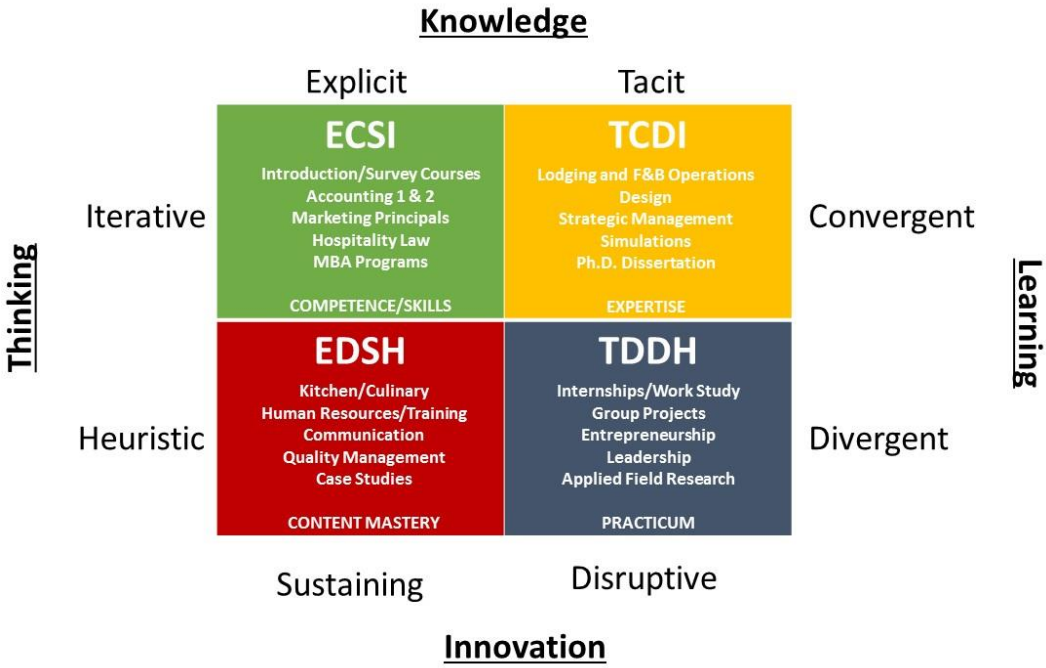

Figure 3. Suggested Curriculum and Learning Levels

Getting to 51%

Let's use the information shared by Danny Meyer in the quote from above but parse individual phrases to help reveal how the theories just discussed are informing the discussion:

> ***Emotional skills are harder to assess**, and it's usually necessary to spend meaningful time with people—often in the work environment—to determine whether or not they are a good fit. But it's critical to begin by being explicit about which emotional skills you are seeking.*

Emotional skills, what Meyer uses to determine the attractiveness of the "51%-ers" to a restaurant unit of USHG, are as he suggests hard to assess. These "soft skills" do not come with easily tested variables. But there is also the 49% applied to the technical skills of the work of hospitality to consider. The explicit knowledge learned in first the **ECSI** and then the **EDSH** afford the student a way to build up a base shared knowledge of facts, protocols and historical constructs (Figure 4). These courses also establish the foundation of a shared vocabulary, and mastery of skills which will allow them to become part of a broader social environment.

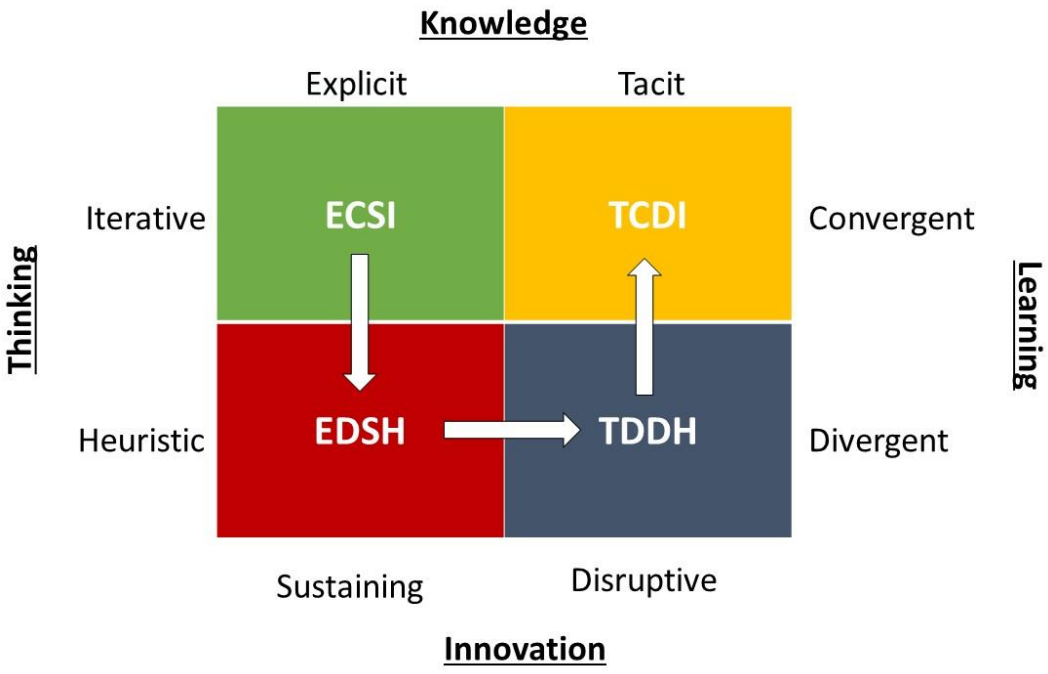

Figure 4. Pathways to Learning

Meyer also suggests that it is important to invest time in each individual in order to highlight the emotional skills his company desires. The slow, iterative process of steady improvement and quality control also appears in the **ECSI** and **EDSH** quadrants.

> … ***necessary to spend meaningful time with people***…

Also embedded in the Meyer observation is the tacit learning only afforded by an individual, experience based and hands-on set of lessons in the actual work environment. This is the internship model used extensively in hospitality management education.

> …***often in the work environment***…

To make his search uniform and standardized, he acknowledges the need for moving from the highly personalized, but inconsistent system of tacit learning. He suggests, as did Collins, the need to share our learning and expertise by making it explicit, articulated, and language based.

> ***…it's critical to begin by being explicit about which emotional skills you are seeking…***

Finally, although it is unstated in his admonition for all business enterprises to include hospitality in their development, he still requires employees to have the technical skills and clear focus to become experts in their endeavors. Whether it is in the expertise of the Sommelier, the Executive Chef, or the Chief Financial Officer, no great hospitality company can survive without highly skilled and knowledgeable practitioners.

A Return To Our Question

So, as I ask my students, and indirectly myself, "How do you teach Hospitality?" the Amalgamated Model may yield a better chance of finding an answer. Not too long ago hospitality management fit comfortably in the experiential apprentice/journeyman/master

craftsman system of observational study. While relevant for the passing along of both tacit and technical skills, this system continues to fall short of the explicit knowledge and fact based needs of a modern business enterprise. Likewise the current effort focused only on financial numeracy and a statistical path to knowledge also falls short in the emotional intelligence necessary to achieve Meyer's 51% status.

Instead of a curriculum being centered in just one or two quadrants, a more holistic approach, one looking to satisfy the requirements of being competent, conceptual, pragmatic and a content expert may yield a more robust and therefore more rigorous choice for hospitality curriculum design in the 21st Century.

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