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E-learning as a training tool for 4*and 5* seasonal hotels in Greece

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Abstract

This dissertation was written as part of the MSc in Hospitality and Tourism Management at the International Hellenic University.

Continuing education and training are now considered as a necessary condition for any personal, work and social need. With the rapid development of Information and Communications Technology, it has become clear that e-learning acquires a very important role as a cognitive and training tool because it meets the need for more flexible and long-term training. Hospitality and Tourism sector is the most financially beneficial business area for Greece, and it employs thousand employees. Hospitality and Tourism sector relies upon the service that employees offer to the guests, so the need for an immediate, modern, flexible and ongoing training for employees as well as the necessity for low cost and minimum working time loss training could be satisfied by the adoption of e-learning as a training method. This research paper aims to examine initially if the 4* and 5* Greek seasonal hotels apply the e-learning as training method or not. The conducted primary research and the data analysis tries to highlight the perceptions that employees have for the use of e-learning as their training tool and to emphasize to the advantages and disadvantages of e-learning. Finally, using the observations carried out the author tries to suggest recommendations for possible use of e-learning in various departments of the hotels. Living in the crisis that the existence of Covid-19[1] virus created in all the social and working aspects of life and its severe circumstances, the Hospitality and Tourism sector is the most damaged. The health crisis and disruption to daily life will be followed by a humanitarian and economic crisis that people have never experienced before. It is not clear when we will be able to go back to our "new" normal life. The new normal will be different than before. We do not know when and we do not know how we will get there. But for sure in the after-virus new reality the Hospitality and Tourism sector should be remodeled.

Keywords: E-learning, Tourism, Hospitality, Training, Human Resources, Information and Communication technology

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[1] *"Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The disease was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, the capital of China's Hubei province, and has since spread globally, resulting in the ongoing 2019–20 coronavirus pandemic. As of 26 April 2020, more than 2.95 million cases have been reported across 185 countries and territories, resulting in more than 205,000 deaths. More than 860,000 people have recovered" (*retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coronavirus_disease_2019) .

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Contents

Introduction

Tourism is the major component of the Greek economy, contributing more than 21 billion euros to the economy from the arrival of around 33 million tourists around the world who visited our country in 2019(Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2019). Also, hospitality and tourism employ a huge number of staff either seasonally or permanently. The training of this staff is a matter of great importance because hospitality and tourism is based on the services that the staff offer to the visitors. The quality of this service is the unique characteristic that make the Greek tourism to stand out. Especially, in 4* and 5* Greek hotels the service level should be exceptional. To accomplish an exceptional level of service and knowledge of their employees to the visitors, the hoteliers should train their staff in an effective and efficient way. To meet the challenges of a fast-paced work environment and safety standards (the period that this research is taking place, the existence of a dangerous virus called COVID-19 affects the public life with devastating consequences for the economy and especially the tourism sector), the tourism organizations should take advantage of the development of ICT (information-communication-technology)in order to develop and incorporate the e-learning technology to their training strategy. Even though that the big hotel chains in other countries have found ways to incorporate the e-learning to their Human Resources strategy, there is still a lack of development and use of e-learning as a training method in Greek tourism industry. E-learning as a training method is a very popular choice and it aims to satisfy the needs of both employees for immediate, modern, flexible and ongoing training as well as the employers for low cost, countable and minimum working time loss training. The conduction of this thesis resulted from personal observations of the author who noticed time-consuming but inefficient training methods during his experience as a seasonal employee in a 5* hotel complex in Greece. The research would be very useful for the hoteliers and the managers not only of 4* and 5* hotel complexes in Greece but also for small and medium tourism enterprises who are obligated to invest and follow new methods for their employees training. This thesis focuses on examining that problem and its goal is to answer the following questions:

 i)if the seasonal employees at 4* and 5* Greek hotels receive efficient training before they take on their duties?,

ii)what percentage of them have received e-learning as a training method?,

iii)which type of training did they prefer mostly?,

iv) if they believe that e-learning could be an effective and efficient training method? and

v) which type of e-learning did they consider as the most effective?

Initially, the author is going to analyze the themes: i)of the modern requirements that are generated because of the technologic evolution, ii) the notion of e-learning as a training method, iii) its categories and its new forms, iv) the advantages and disadvantages that e-learning has as a training method, v)examples of e-learning effectiveness. Then, the author is going to analyze the methods that he follows to collect the data, the research limitations, how the questionnaire has been

designed and the methods that he used to analyze the answers he concentrated from the questionnaire. After that, the analysis of every question of the questionnaire is going to be inspected and the conclusions will be quoted. Finally, recommendations for the future use and incorporation of e-learning as a core training method in Greek 4* and 5* hotels are going to be suggested.

Literature Review

Human resources training

Modern-days requirements

Common phenomenon at the modern society are the changes in economic, working and social conditions, as well as globalization and technological advances that affect whole industries, businesses and organizations. As a result, these challenges have an effect on the abilities part of pretty much every job and they create the necessity for each worker to learn and gain new information, new aptitudes, new methodologies and mentalities so as to conquer the advanced difficulties. Such challenges may be the provision of high-quality products and services, the possession of a high level of professional experience by employees, the necessity of integrating technology into business operations and the expansion of business to foreign markets. The fast changes to ordinary working lives achieved by computerized innovation, the Internet and web-based social networking are probably not going to be stopped. (Noe et al., 2006, pg. 18). Due to modern fast changing and fully unpredictable working conditions, many jobs and traditional industries have already disappeared or been relocated to other countries. Luckily for the hospitality and tourism industry, there is no probability of the main customer services it provides to become totally redundant in the direct future. According to Boella and Goss-Turner (2013, pg. 104-105) some types of jobs related with tourism industry may disappear through technological improvement or through outsourcing, but the industry will continue to prosper, not only at a national level but mostly at an international level (Boella and Goss-Turner, 2013, pg.104-105).

The duty for ensuring that the working population in hospitality and tourism industry is furnished with the appropriate knowledge and techniques to cope with these changes, lies on a number of interested committees. Initially, the state (government) has the responsibility to provide the appropriate infrastructure, vocational education and training frameworks to students who want to follow the hospitality and tourism industry. Universities, colleges and private training providers also help importantly to the overall training effort and to the acquisition of the vocational certificate. Last but not least, the hospitality industry itself, the organizations and the businesses have a huge responsibility and challenge in securing that its vast workforce, is trained to the correct level in order to deliver high quality service standards and high quality products(Boella and Goss-Turner, 2013, pg.104-105). In order to respond to the challenges of new conditions, businesses

need to adopt modern practices in the development, improvement and training of their staff. Practices, such as employee training and development, benefit both the participating parties – employers are benefited from the quality of their employees' performance to achieve the goals that they set for their businesses and employees satisfy their need for growth, recognition and job satisfaction (Tyson, and York, 2004, pg. 161-162). So, it is recognized that human resources department is crucial in ensuring and preserving effectiveness, quality and responsiveness in businesses to a continuously changing and complexing environment. Heery and Noon (2008, pg. 213) describe Human Resources Development as *"the process of encouraging employees to acquire new skills and knowledge through various training programs, courses and learning packages"*. The departments of Human Resources need to target on how organizations and their staff can survive and stay competitive in an ever more complexing and evolving environment (Nickson, 2013, pg. 143). Training and development can be considered as a key instrument in the performance of Human Resources Management practices. McKenna and Beech (2008) point some benefits that are emerged from training, including:

- Helps employees learn jobs more quickly and effectively
- Improves work performance of existing and keeps them up to date in special skills
- Leads to a greater volume of work resulting from fewer mistakes and greater rapidity
- Creates an attitude more receptive to coping with change
- Can help to reduce turnover among new and established staff
- Improves employee's efficiency
- Enhances employee's confidence

E-learning

Definition of e-learning

The digital revolution contributes to the development of new business models, to the creation of new ways of organizing the work as well as to the composition of new innovative methods on the learning industry. According to Wild et al., (2002), *"E-learning or online learning, is defined as the creation and distribution of organizational knowledge through the online delivery of information, communication, education and training which is responsible for the learning revolution that could help to create unprecedented opportunities within organizations"* (Wild et al., 2002, pg. 371-380). Zhang and Nunamaker (2003) define electronic learning as *"learning that takes place anytime someone uses electronic means for gathering information that is acquired without another live person present"* (Zhang and Nunamaker, 2003, pg. 207- 218). Horton (2000) believes that *"e-learning is one of the biggest changes in the way people conduct training since the invention of the blackboard or perhaps the alphabet"* (Horton, 2000). E-learning isn't just about utilizing Web-based advances or separation learning, yet it is a way that empowers associations or people to trade data and increase information. (Sigala, 2002).

Different models and categorizations have been developed regarding the use of e-learning, varying depending on the existence or no of the trainer, the method (synchronous or asynchronous) that is going to be used and the personalized or group-learning method. Of course, each of the above methods and categorizations could incorporate elements from any other form of e-learning. For example, the first diversification is based on the presence of a trainer or a third factor that can help trainees get involved (Kampourakis and Loukis, 2006, pg. 26):

➢ Learner-led e-learning: learner-oriented e-learning, or standalone or self-paced (directed) e-learning (SPEL).
➢ Facilitated e-learning: assisted, in which the instructor communicates with the other participants. The instructor does not deliver the educational material, but he/she assists the educational process by answering questions and acting as moderator of the discussion.
➢ Instructor-led-e-learning: instructor oriented. It allows the trainee to communicate with the trainer, but often not in real time. By creating a virtual classroom, the instructor simulates a real-time lesson using media that allow audio and picture. This means that the trainee can attend a training module, ask questions to the trainer by e-mail or through an application that offers opportunities for online chat and receive the answers at any other time.
➢ Embedded e-learning: integrated e-learning. Knowledge is offered whenever it deems necessary or requested. These systems may take the form of help files or tutorial.

In terms of training in particular, the more general categorization is usually related to the type of technology (software, equipment, tools) that is used: Computer Based Training (CBT), Multimedia Based Technology (MBT), Web Based Technology (WBT) or online training, Internet Based Technology (IBT), Virtual Classroom (VC) and Electronic Performance Support Systems (EPSS) (Faherty, 2003, pg.11).

According to the content that the training lesson will contain, the formats of e-learning are divided into (Faherty, 2003, pg.11):

• Information Technologies Training: related to training in Information Communication Technologies for use of hardware, software, networks and information systems.
• Soft Skill Training: mainly about vocational training characterized topics that are not related with IT Training but refer to other cognitive themes like management, human resources, economics, marketing, sales and services.

The most frequent separation of e-learning is between the synchronous or live and the asynchronous form of the method and is related to the way that the content is transferred and the time that the participants communicate.

• In the synchronous form of e-learning, the participants are watching at the same time (live) and with the same rhythm. The content of the lesson is provided between two or more

directions at the same time and the trainees participate in the lesson at real time from his/her personal or working place. So, we have the creation of a virtual class without geographical restrictions but with same time connection of the participants. Tools for the synchronous form of e-learning are the chat, teleconference, screen sharing, e-whiteboards, application sharing tools, virtual classrooms, blogs and social networking.

- Asynchronous form of e-learning is used more frequently than synchronous form. It provides the content of the lesson to only one direction but at the time that the trainee wants, which means that the e-training is not provided and received at the same time. The trainer has the opportunity to prepare the content of the lesson and to save it in an electronic media. The trainee can watch the lesson anywhere and anytime wants. Tools for the asynchronous form of e-learning are the CD-ROMs and DVDs, audiovisual aids, videos, e-mails and other applications of communications between users like discussion groups, bulletin boards or newsgroups (Gustafson, 2002)

Trends in e-learning technology

Technology! The expectations when someone hear the word "technology" are collected in new innovative ways in order to change something or to make it more affordable. The potential of technology and innovation has made e-learning a sustainable alternative to traditional learning, and the latest trends can be game-changers in corporate training. The best trends of e-learning technology as training method should be learning solutions that meet the learner's needs. Azzopardi (2018) describes the new trends in e-learning technology that helps us to optimize their function for trainers and the fledgling workforce:

i. Mobile Learning or m-learning is when the learners' personal computer gets integral to preparing conveyance. Currently, present day eLearning apparatuses are advanced for cell phones, which implies laborers can access any or all data and courses straightforwardly from their gadget. Aside from offering portable learning materials with greater intelligence, it likewise helps students to take an interest in physical meetings. This can be called blended learning and permits coaches to assemble a cross breed meeting where substance is conveyed face to face, however tests occur on the student's telephone. As a result of portable learning, the workers can likewise leave or get feedback about their preparation experience. They can pose questions in a hurry, or even leave remarks on the viability of the course. This all aides in improving courses later (Azzopardi, 2018).

ii. Microlearning: typically, the employees learn at their own pace, but they will most likely lean toward littler 'bite-sized' content instead of longer material. E-learning platforms permit the managers to adjust to this developing need by producing courses with modules of less numbers of pages—or surprisingly better, present their staff with summary-videos that they can watch in 'bursts'. Microlearning is not about less training or less data retention. Actually, according to research, microlearning can prompt employees' embracing a learning platform unquestionably more possibly (Azzopardi, 2018).

iii. Gamification: this e-learning form has been widely used by almost every social media platform, marketers and advertisers. Gamification expects to pull in and re-draw in students towards the platform with the plan to build up a positive propensity for learning. By utilizing encouraging feedback, sound rivalry, and prizes employees can end up enjoying the experience unquestionably more than first envisioned. The clarification is clear, when we reward individuals for their endeavors, the outcome is frequently a developing trust in the executives and the system all in all. Obviously, this must be utilized mindfully, and we should consistently reward individuals reasonably and at whatever point an advancement was genuinely accomplished (Azzopardi 2018).

iv. Video-based learning: How frequently happens to reject content-based guidelines and finally select a fast and useful YouTube video? Tourism and hospitality should follow the same path in training their workforce. On the off chance that we can show our staff the best approach to accomplish something, and if the video is moderately short (a video which lasts under 3 minutes would be ideal), it is more possible for managers to see improvements in their everyday presentation at the job. Video creation is not that much expensive. Today, teachers and supervisors around the globe are assuming control over issues and creating lo-fi, however equally successful video-based courses. Now and again we had the option to accomplish more prominent outcomes with a $100 camera by recording ourselves or associates than with a $5,000 training program that goes on until the end of time (Azzopardi, 2018).

Advantages and disadvantages of e-learning

According to the majority of the researchers the main advantage of e-learning as a training method is the prospect of flexible-location, cost-effective and time-independent learning environments that urge the trainees to participate in training lessons via e-learning systems. So, organizations and businesses could be able to acquire and deliver to their staff knowledge and information that can support them to achieve a competitive advantage due to their skill competencies and knowledge. Especially, small businesses will acquire via e-learning the intellectual and knowledge capital that arrange them to compete in today's dynamically shifting market (Buhalis, 1998, pg. 409-423). Cobanoglou et al., (2006) believe that e-learning could be used for soft-skills training in the hospitality industry and especially in the hotel segment. Being able to handle customer's inquiries and complaints, maintaining professional and ethical standards are recognized as the most fundamental competencies in the hotel workplace. Soft skills identified as the key elements for the acquisition of loyal clients (Cobanoglou, Dede, and Poorani, 2006, pg. 19-35). Moreover, Collins, Buhalis and Peters (2003) add that ongoing training (via e-learning) will be very useful for both managers, supervisors and employees in order to weed the high rates of employee turnover out of the tourism and hospitality industry (Collins, Buhalis, and Peters, 2003, pg. 484-485).

However, despite the benefits that are emerged from the use of e-learning, some researchers do not believe that e-learning could be used as an effective training tool for improving the employee's skills or as a replacement for traditional training. Cheng and Piccoli (2002) have also

suggested that on-the-job and face-to-face training are more important, especially in teaching soft skills (Cheng, and Piccoli, 2002, pg. 19-33). Furthermore, small and medium business enterprises may not have the appropriate technological infrastructure to support the investment of e-learning or they do not have the expertise staff who is going to handle the e-learning technology as well as they do not make a research in order to be informed about the effectiveness of e-learning as training method. So, they do not consider it as a priority for their staff training and they identify it as a lack of their financial resources (Collins, Buhalis, and Peters, 2003, pg. 484-485). Some of the advantages and disadvantages of e-learning are illustrated below:

Advantages	*Disadvantages*
Travel expenses and training time are eliminated	Introductory establishment and running costs or purchasing access to commercial systems could be expensive
Enhances employee performance	Employees cannot use the system unless an infrastructure is placed
Provides immediate information	Difficulty of many small and medium enterprises to connect to high speed Internet
Removing the need of hardcopy manuals,	Trainees require high level of self-discipline
Offers to the employees the chance to integrate learning with work	Students do not give sufficient feedback for the tutor and hence for the whole practice of eLearning itself
Can increase efficiency	Specific skills are required for electronic communication and many people and especially the elders may not acquire them
Allows the employees to learn at their own pace	For reasons of determining what information employees are learning, it is almost necessary for an assessment system to be in place
Trainees have also the opportunity to access additional online material	In asynchronous form of e-learning the interaction with the instructor is limited and learning is impersonal
Increases the efficiency of the operations of hotels and the satisfaction of guests and employees	
Delivery of a consistent message companywide to all trainees or employees	
The personal success of the trainees and potential workers rely on their own responsibility	

The effectiveness of e-learning as a training method

The effectiveness of a training method is often associated with its evaluation and as a meaning, is interpreted differently from the participants in the learning procedure. Thus, for the organization effective is an e-learning training program when efficient learning occurs, and low dropout rates were noted. Also, the organizations' main target from an effective e-learning training method is the efficient transfer of knowledge to the staff at the lowest possible costs. For trainees, e-learning is effective when it is personalized to their own learning style and responds to the demands of their job. Similarly, for trainers the e-learning as a training method is effective when it facilitates their lore and work and when they understand that trainees respond positively to their training. It is really difficult to define the meaning of an effective e-learning program and how this could be evaluated because the effectiveness is related with the goals that every business has established. Although, there is a rich bibliography about the design, the development and implementation of e-learning training methods, however, there is insufficient information as to why some e-learning programs were not as successful as expected. Usually, researchers link effectiveness with specific objectives, high performance, satisfaction and job competence (Brennan, McFadden and Law, 2001). Unfortunately, the available publications in the modern bibliography on vocational training and e-learning in tourism industry mainly concern applications in foreign countries, pointing to the luck of individualized qualitative and quantitative data for Greek tourism companies. This is reasonable due the fact that staff training is a part of the strategic competition of its business and its result are usually not made public.

Nickson (2013) cite two examples, related with the effectiveness of the e-learning as a training tool, which used from two multi-regional companies. According to the first example Thomas Cook[2] use the e-learning as a training method for their worldwide staff with purpose to reduce the large costs that the use of traditional training created and to establish a more flexible mean of training. Mari Morrison, head of learning and development at Thomas Cook suggests e-learning as a cost-effective and more flexible type of training for the staff. As she notes, *"our sales consultants have a bespoke e-learning systems program that has achieved substantial costs savings. It used to be a two-day course and is now a four-hour e-learning program, broken down into sections so you do not have to go four hours in one go"*. It is estimated by the company that £ 35.000 in travel expenses for trainees and £ 25.000 in improved efficiency by reducing the amount of time spent in the classroom, were saved because of the application of e-learning. Remarkable is the fact that e-learning has been received very positively by employees. Having completed such training, trainees ranked their knowledge of the key sales systems at 3.97 out of

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[2] *Thomas Cook Group plc was a British global travel group. It was formed on 19 June 2007 by the merger of Thomas Cook AG (itself the successor to Thomas Cook & Son) and MyTravel Group. The group operated in two separate segments: a tour operator and an airline. Thomas Cook employed approximately 21.000 employees worldwide. It also operated travel agencies in Europe. On 23 September 2019 Thomas Cook Group and all UK entities went into compulsory liquidation (retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Cook_Group).*

5(whereas previously the feedback following training had ranked it at 2.37) and the mainstream in-house products at 4.14 out of 5(whereas previously the feedback following training had ranked it at 2.92). Mari Harrison also claim that the company take advantage of the manner in which the online training empowers the quick and easy delivery of information across large numbers of employees – something that is very helpful for multi-unit organizations or companies that have many businesses in different places. Last but not least, *"my development"* page gives the opportunity to managers and employees the measure their progress (Nickson, 2013, pg.164-165).

The second example of Nickson (2013) is related to the continuous improvement of services standards that exclusive hotels should provide to their clients. Specifically, employees in the Hilton Garden Inn Hotel[3] had the opportunity, in the context of improvement of the service standards, to use the e-learning and more specifically the virtual reality tool. Using the virtual reality tool allows staff to play with a range of different hotel scenarios in four areas – front desk, food and beverage, maintenance and housekeeping. The training emulates real working time scenarios where the staff has to meet customer's requirement at demanding situations. The training program lasted 30 days. The virtual reality as a training program proved very popular with employees in allowing them to enhance their service standards and to be able to respond effectively to any situation. Last but not least, the program also proved cost-effective for the company ((Nickson, 2013, pg.164-165).

"On-the-job" and "Off-the-job" training

"On the job training is called the learning through watching and observing someone with greater experience perform a task. On the job training is a very popular method of training when new skills and methods are being taught to employees" (Nickson, 2013, pg. 162-163). Especially in the hospitality and tourism industry where much of the employee's work is performed in direct contact with clients the training of new staff has to be performed during the job so that experience from dealing with customers and other staff could be acquired. This method also called "sitting next to Nellie" (Boella and Goss-Turner, 2013, pg.108-109). Usually, this process of mentoring would be from the managerial staff and the selected individual will often be someone who has the experience, knowledge and the aspiration to reach senior management levels. The pros of on the job training are that is cheap, the trainees get the opportunity to practice immediately, trainees get the feedback without delay and it also, assists in integrating trainees into existing teams. The cons are that the "experienced employee" may pass bad habits or behaviors to the trainee, also may have neither the suitable personality nor the necessary training skills. Moreover, the trainer may not even have been told exactly what to instruct (Boella and Goss-Turner, 2013, pg.108-109).

In opposition to on-the-job training, off-the-job training is separated to in company off-the-job training where the training takes place outside of the employee's normal work place but

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[3] *Hilton Garden Inn is a brand of mid-priced, focused service hotels owned by Hilton Worldwide. As of December 31, 2018, it has 815 properties with 118,675 rooms, including 77 that are managed with 14,538 rooms and 738 that are franchised with 104,137 rooms (retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hilton_Garden_Inn).*

inside the company and external off-the-job training where the training happens somewhere external to the organization (Nickson, 2013, pg. 163-164). Off-the-job training often involves a training intervention run by a specialized training department or from managers. This type of training could be relatively straightforward or concerned with achieving proficiency in more advanced skills. In this type of training information and knowledge could be transmitted to a large number of trainees. There is a wide variety of other methods that come under the broad heading of off-the-job training. In an active vein, role plays, case studies and simulations may be useful in hospitality organization (especially in developing customer service skills) and in a relatively passive sense, lectures and seminars. Furthermore, learning via interactive computer learning packages (what is often named e-learning) could be classified in off-the-job training and more specifically in both categories of off-the-job training (internal – external). If the e-learning training takes place in the company, then it is classified in internal off-the-job training and if it happens in trainees home or other places outside of the company then it assorted in external off-the-job training (Nickson, 2013, pg. 164-165).

Methodology

Introduction

Methodology section aims to give a detailed description of the research methods used in order for the research to be successfully conducted. The importance of this chapter lies in the fact that explains what has been done and how has been done. In a research paper, the methodology section allows the reader to critically evaluate a study's overall validity and reliability. The present chapter will introduce the way the data has been collected and how the author analyzed it, which tools or materials have been used in the research and what is the author's rationale for choosing these methods. There will be also discussed the limitations of the chosen method and the problems encountered during the research.

Research Data

One of the most important issue in the dissertation is to choose the appropriate research technique in order to answer the questions of the research. For the collection of the data there are two diversified methods. The primary research method and the secondary research. Both of these techniques are used in this survey in order to achieve better and more sufficient conclusions.

The research process began with an examination of a secondary data in order to be able to give an academically and theoretical basis for any further primary research. Secondary research embraces information and data which already exist. Data and information that is already published before. Literature in research can perform in a variety of ways. It can be utilized as the whole basis for a survey, it can give the writers different point of views of the topic or it can be used to compare or support the new research. For this survey, for the collection of the information and data many

different forms of sources have been utilized. Most of the information come from academic articles, books and journals. Furthermore, many websites have being used to collect important information.

Subsequently, the original data collected directly by the researcher. Primary research is the selection of data and information that cannot be gathered from another source. Data that is new and is being gathered for the first time. It was made a heavy effort to collect primary data in order to successful investigate if the employers at tourism industry use the e-learning as a training tool for the staff, the effect and the results that e-learning has as a training method and the opinion that the employees has about the e-learning.

Data Collection Methods

For the purpose of capturing the different dimensions of the topic, gaining better understanding and produce safe results the author made quantitative research. Quantitative research involves statistical analysis. It relies on numerical evidence to draw conclusions or to test hypotheses. The outcome is a limited understanding of a large, 'representative' group. The quantitative data collection method that has been chosen was the participation survey in the form of questionnaire because is a reliable and quick method, is the easiest one (in terms of efficiency, cost and time) to gather information from numerous participants (sample) of a broad and heterogeneous population and allows to examine variables that can be measured and quantified.

Questionnaire Design

The survey was conducted in Thessaloniki during 09.03.2020 to 29.03.2020, lasted 3 weeks and was actually an electronic questionnaire distributed online. It was a questionnaire designed through Google Forms and contained open and close-ended questions. The quastionnaire included 8 multiple choice, yes or no, rating scale, checkboxes and 1 open-ended questions concerning information about the training that employees in 4* and 5* hotel complexes in Greece received,the frequence that e-learning has been used as a training method, the perception that the employees has about e-learning and if they believe that e-learning can help them to be more effective and efficient to their job, etc. (see apendix) and 6 demographic questions. As regards the sampling method, the researcher chose the judgmental sampling or purposive sampling, which actually means that the criterion of why the sample is chosen by the researcher is his opinion of who would be most appropriate to contribute to the study. This sampling type is mainly used when the number of the experts in the researched area is limited, or when the interest of the research focuses on a particular field or a small group. For this survey the sample need to be people who work or have worked in tourism section and especially in 4* and 5* seasonal hotels in Greece. For this reason, the questionnaire distributed specifically to the graduated and post-graduated students of "Management of Hospitality and Tourism Industry" programme of the International Hellenic University and to the graduated and post-graduated students of the "Tourism Management" programme of the University of Macedonia, in order to secure that the

sample are people who work in the tourism industry. Moreover the questionnaire shared in several Social Media Platforms, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter with a note to be answered only by people who work on tourism industry. Of cource the cover letter of the questionnaire make it clear that need to be answered only by people who work or have worked in tourism section   and specifically in 4*   and 5* seasonal hotels in Greece. Finally, the sample size was 150 participants and all their responses were included in the analysis.

Questionnaire Analysis Methods

Initially, the dataset was checked for missing data and outliers and then analyzed using Excel software for statistical analysis. After the collection of 150 responses, the author used the   Sheet produced by Google Forms and he continued with the coding of them using the Excel. Coding is called the numerical presentation of the answers so they can be statistically analyzed. It is important to be mentioned that the yes or no answers were transformed to 1 or 0 respectively, and the rating scale ones were coded from 5 to 1 (where 5 the most positive answer, where 1 the most negative). Considering the 1 open-ended question, it was not transformed into numerical value and it has been used actually for the collection of ideas in order for the author to explore what kind of e-learning techniques the employers use for the training of their staff and use them as recommendations for the hoteliers.

After the coding was completed, a statistical analysis was followed:

Descriptive Statistics are used to portray the fundamental highlights of the information in an investigation. They give straightforward synopsis about the sample and the measures. Along with simple graphic analysis, they structure the basis of each quantitative examination of information. The most useful of them are the mode and the median. Moreover, other measures have been used so as to present helpful information in tables and Charts.

Research Limitations

Even though the purpose of the research was to be as much as possible trustworthy and reliable and the research methods were chosen for that reason, there are some limitations and obstacles that the author faced. Initially, for the verification and the confirmation of the questionnaire answers, the author wanted to conduct also in-depth interviews with professionals involved in management of 4* and 5* hotels and owners of exclusive hotels but the unfortunate event of the appearance of COVID-19 virus prevented the author. This was reasonable due to the fact that the owners and the managers were confused and worried about the upcoming touristic season. Moreover, for hygiene reasons the meetings postponed and the majority of them did not have enough time to interview through skype. Further to this, staff training is part of the strategic competition among hotel companies (every company wants to train their employees in order to offer to their customers a personalized and unique service that other companies could not) so the results and the methods that they use are not usually made public.

Another limitation could be associated to the sample size. It was difficult to control the response speed and the deadline pressed the author, so the sample of 150 respondents could be considered as small. The cover letter of the questionnaire make it clear that need to be answered only by people who work or have worked in tourism section and specifically in 4* and 5* hotels in Greece but there is no method in order to verify if the respondents honestly work there.

Limitations also arose from the fact that the author is not an IT specialist and he comes from a theoretical background so he could not estimate exactly the equipment and the technologies that the 4* or 5* hotels need to incorporate in order to obtain an e-learning application technology. Furthermore, the author could not be able to calculate the costs for the purchase and the expenses that hotels need in order to preserve and update applications and e-learning systems. That is the reason why in the research the author does not mention anything about costs. This thesis is only a very small indication of how 4* and 5* hotels could icorporate e-learning technology as a training method for the enhancement and the empowerment of the employees skills. This thesis aims to constitute the onset for future studies about the embodiment of e-learning practices into the training strategy of the Greek hotel industry and especially for 4* and 5* hotels.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Questionnaire Data Analysis
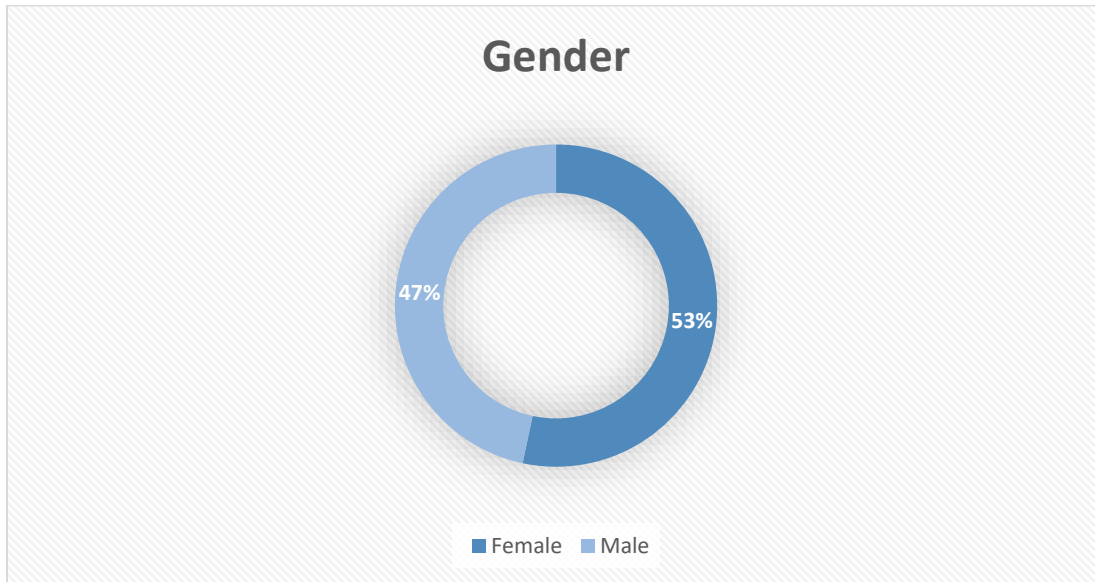
Chart 1

Starting with the analysis of the answers to the questionnaire, we first notice that the first three questions are related with the demographic data of the respondents. Demographic data is statistical data collected about the characteristics of the sample, e.g. age, gender and education. For example,

in the first question related to the gender, we see (Chart 1) that there is almost a balance between the male (53%) and the female (47%) gender of the respondents.
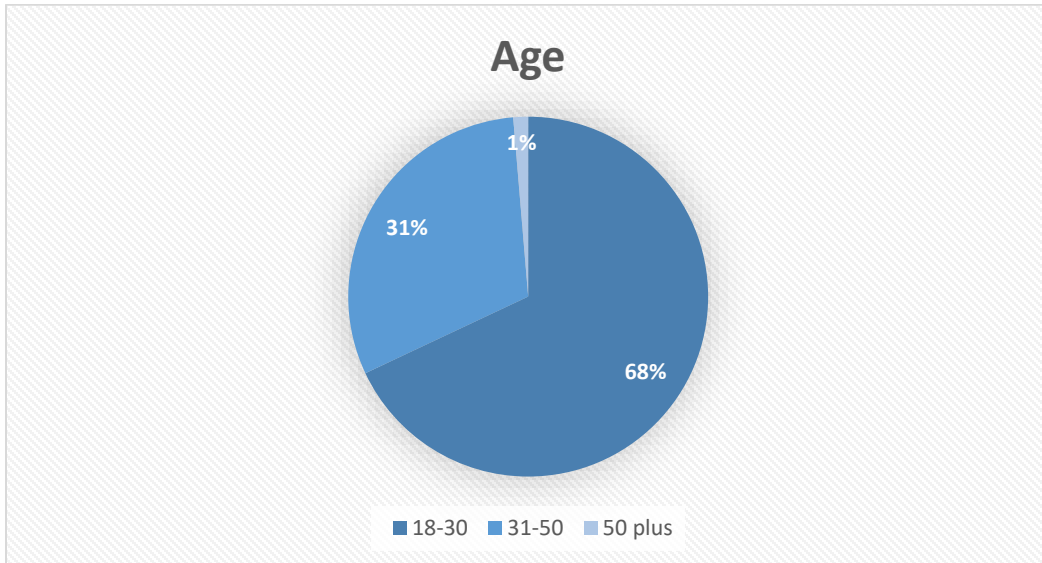
Age

Chart 2

In terms of the age (Chart 2), the biggest percentage (68%) of the people who participate in this survey is between 18-30 years, which means that the majority of the employees in 4* and 5* hotels in Greece are young people who probably know how to use the Internet and Personal Computers but we will analyze this matter in a question below. The 31% of the respondents are between 31-50 years old and surprisingly, only the 1% of the respondents is fifty years old or older which means that Greek 4* and 5* hotels employ mostly people younger than 50 years old.
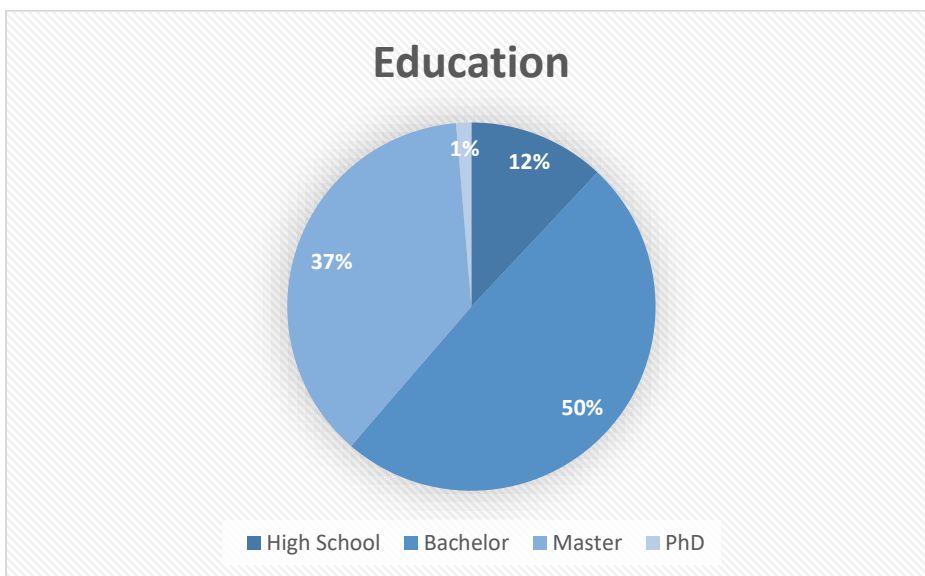
Education

Chart 3

Concerning the level of education that the sample has completed (Chart3), we notice that exactly the half of the respondents have a bachelor degree, 37% of the respondents hold a master degree (percentage especially high which mean that employees are qualified, educated and undoubtedly they have already use e-learning platforms during their academic education), 12% of the participants have a high school diploma and only the 1% have PhD.
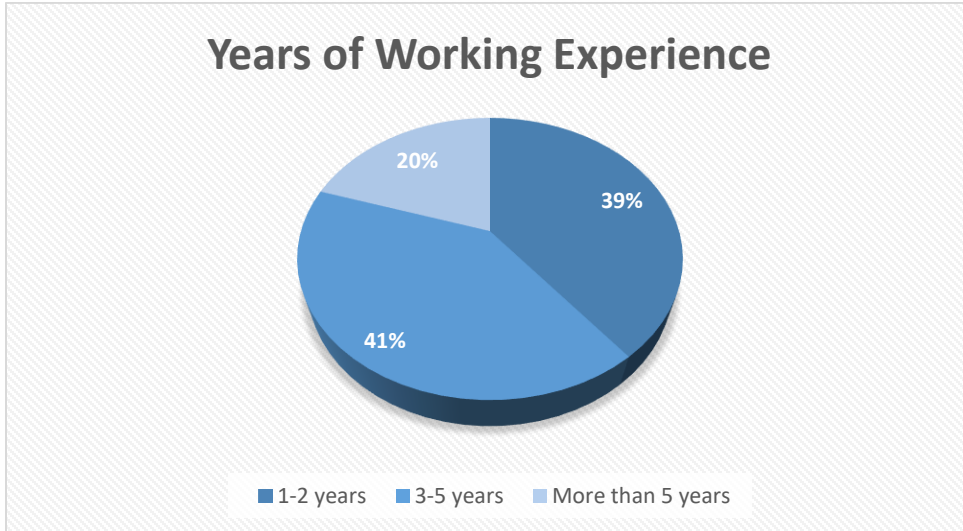

Chart 4

Question number 4 is related with the working experience that the participants in the research have in 4*and 5* hotels in Greece (Chart 4). Looking the answers, we understand that the percentages of those that have 1-2 and 3-5 years of experience are almost the same (39% and 41% respectively) and the percentage of those who have more than 5 years' experience is lower (20%).
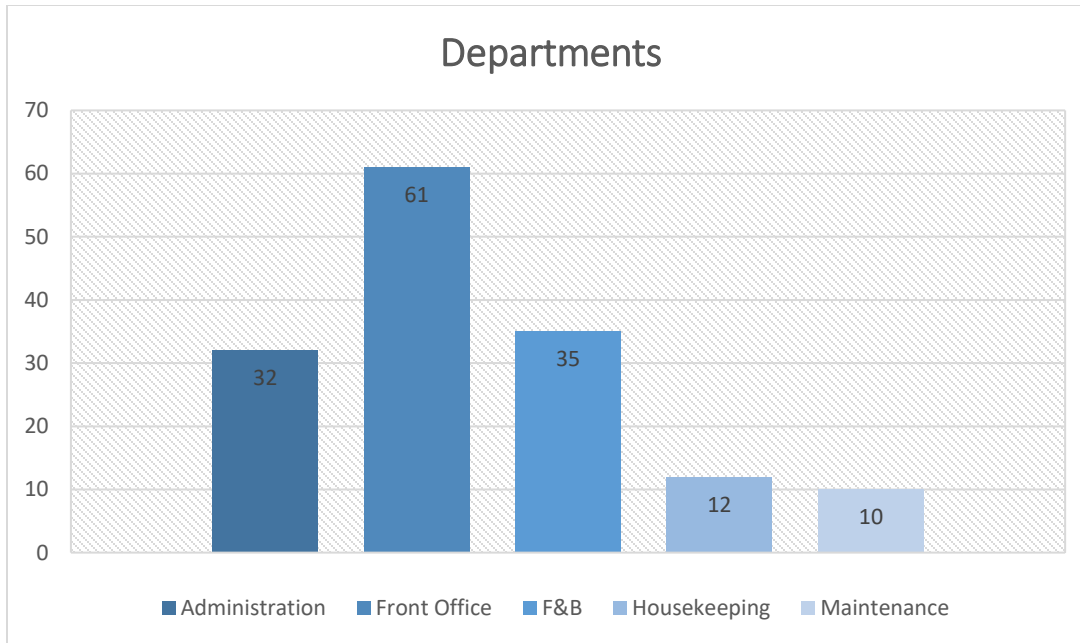
Chart 5

To continue with the next question that was "In which department of the hotel are you working in?" and was aiming to discover the job position of the participants. As the Chart 5 reveals, the majority of the respondents worked at Front Office department (61 respondents out of 150) which include the receptionists and the guest relations. The second biggest number of the respondents worked for the Food and Beverage department (35 out of 150 respondents) and very close is the number of participants who worked in Administration department (32 out of 150 respondents) which include the reservation department, the accountant department and the sales and marketing department. The departments where the lower number of respondents worked in are the housekeeping (12 out of 150 respondents) and maintenance (10 out of 150 respondents).

	Training Receive
Mean	3,14
Standard Error	0,10
Median	3,00
Mode	4,00
Standard Deviation	1,16
Sample Variance	1,36
Kurtosis	-0,90
Skewness	-0,30
Range	4,00
Minimum	1,00
Maximum	5,00
Sum	471,00
Count	150,00

Picture 1

Chart 6

One of the objectives of this research is to reveal the frequency that the participants received training before the seasonal opening. Chart 6 shows that the 56 out of 150 participants frequently receive training before the seasonal opening. Furthermore, 33 of the respondents received training seldom while 32 of the participants received training sometimes. Unexpectedly high (15 out of 150respondents) is the number of people who answer that they have never received training before the season starts which means that probably some hotels apply ''on the job training'' for their employees. Last but not least, 14 of the respondents answer that they always receive training before seasonal opening, number very small if we consider that the research address to employees of 4* and 5* hotels in Greece where the service should be professional and in high level.

Looking picture 1, it is worth mentioning that the "mean" of training received before season starts is 3.14 (from the scale 1: never to 5: always). The "mean" is the mathematical average of a set of two or more numbers. The result is closer to 3, so the average of the answers of the participants reveals that **sometimes** the employees receive training before the open day of the hotels.
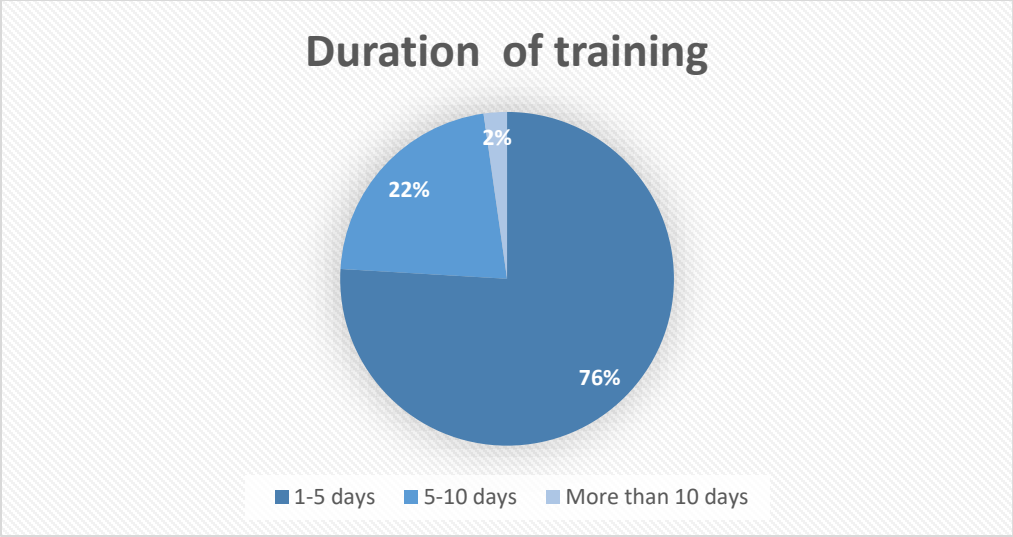
Duration of training

2%

22%

76%

■ 1-5 days ■ 5-10 days ■ More than 10 days

Chart 7

The next question required from the participants to answer how many days their training lasted (Chart 7). By far the biggest percentage (76%) of the respondents answered that their training lasted between 1-5 days. 22% of the employees answered that the duration of their training was 5-10 days and only 2% of the participants said that they have received more than 10 days training.
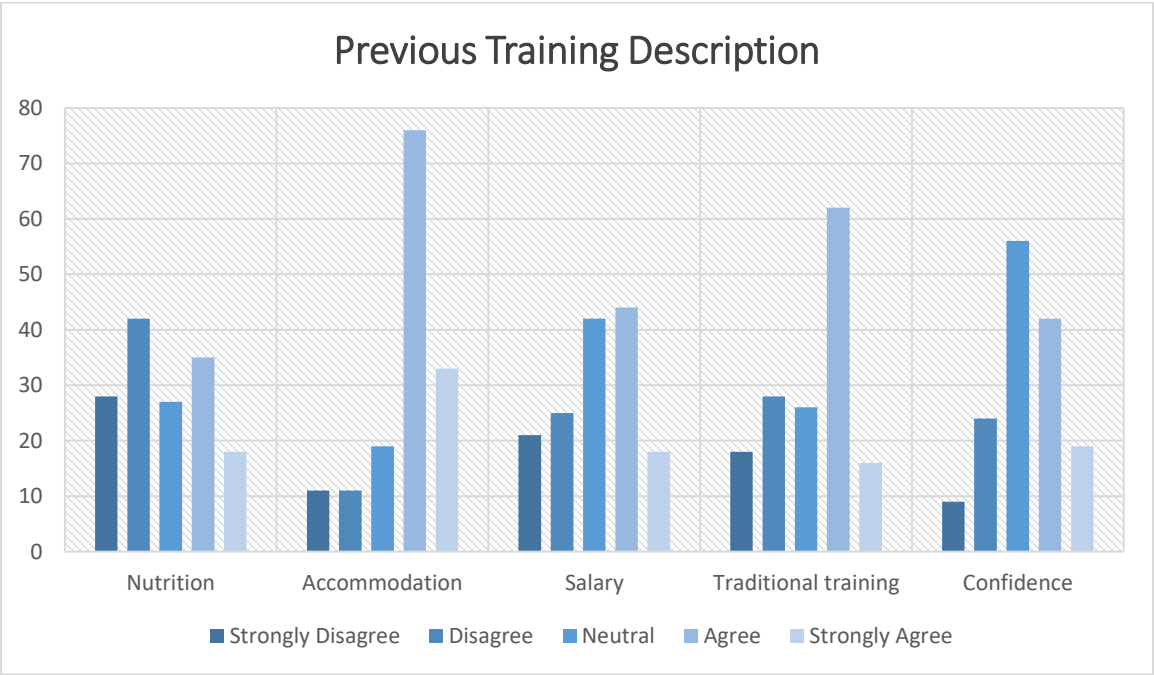
Previous Training Description

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

Chart8

For the better understanding of what the previous training of the respondents contains, the author asked them to describe the circumstances of their training (Chart 8).The respondents had to strongly agree-agree-neutral-disagree and strongly disagree with questions that related with the conditions of their training time. The purpose of this question is also to interpret the expenses that employers made for the training of their staff and if the employees believe that they have felt confident after the training. At first, the participants have been asked if their job offered them nutrition and the answers were shared. 70 of the participants answered that they disagree and strongly disagree that during their training their employers offered them nutrition and 53 of them agree that their training contained nutrition. 27 responded "neutral" to this question which could be explained that some of their previous jobs supplied them with nutrition and some other not. To continue with accommodation where 103 out of 150 respondents said that their hotels provided them with accommodation in contrast with 22 of the participants whose jobs did not provide them with accommodation. 19 of the respondents answered "neutral" which mean that some of their jobs provided them with accommodation and some others did not. According to their salary during their training the 62 of the respondents said that they were paid during training and 46 answered that they were not. 42 participants answered "neutral" which explained that they have worked in companies where their training was paid and the opposite. Moreover, the participants had to answer if their training was based on traditional type of training methods (like role-playing, scripts, written manuals or group conversations) and more than the half (78 out of 150) agreed that their training included traditional methods. 46 of the participants answered that they disagree with that and 26 answered "neutral" which means that their experience up to now sometimes includes and sometimes not traditional methods during their training. At last, the participants have been asked if they feel confident to undertake their duties after their training and 61 (out of 150) agreed with that and 33 disagreed. 56 participants chose to answer "neutral" and to show to the author that firstly, during their career they have both felt and not confident after their training and secondly, their training does not fully cover their needs in order to agree with that. To conclude, the answers in this question betray that the majority of Greek 4* and 5* hotel companies provide their employees with accommodation and salary, but they do not provide them with nutrition during the training period. That means huge expenses for the hotel companies in order to capture the accommodation and salary needs of their staff. Furthermore, the largest group of employees answer that they do not feel confident (56 out of 150 answer "neutral" and 33 disagree and strongly disagree) to take on their duties after the training period. But why the hotel companies in Greece spend so much money to train their staff if they answer that they do not feel ready to work efficiently after their training? Probably the answer is that the traditional methods that the Greek hotel companies use (more than 50% of the respondents answer that) do not cover their needs for completed training.

Have you ever received E-learning, as a form of your seasonal job training?
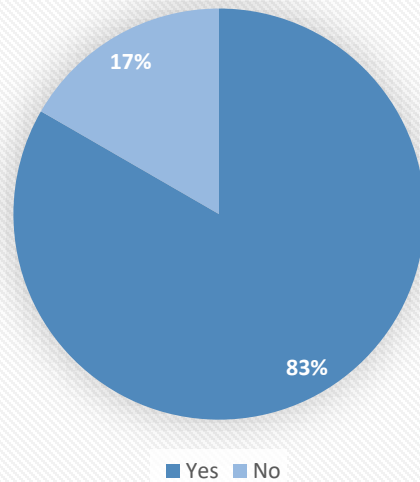
17%

83%

■ Yes ■ No

Chart 9

The next question asked the participants to say if they have received anytime, during their career in 4* and 5* hotels in Greece (see Chart 9), e-learning as a form of their seasonal job training and the 83% of the respondents answer that they have not. Only the 17% of people who took part in the research answer that they have received e-learning training. The huge difference reveals that the HR departments of the most exclusive and luxury hotels in Greece have not investigated the advantages that the incorporation of e-learning at their training programs may benefit them. Maybe they have not even examined the opportunities and the cost savings that e-learning may offer to the companies.

After the question that the author asked the participants to answer if they have ever received E-learning as a form of their seasonal job training, the author asked from the respondents who answer "yes" to give examples to what type of e-learning did they received (Question 10). The respondents gave various answers which means that e-learning could have multiple forms and it could be applied in several departments of the hotel industry. The most common of these answers were the simulation of the reservation or the operation system that the departments of reservation and front office respectively use. Another common answer was that through e-learning the employees of front office and F&B department simulate some scenarios and script roles that may meet in real time job. Another common answer was that through e-learning there were a real time meeting and conversation between the managers and the employees where managers analyze their future daily duties and the quality standards of the hotels.

"In case you had the option to choose your training, which one you would likely choose?"
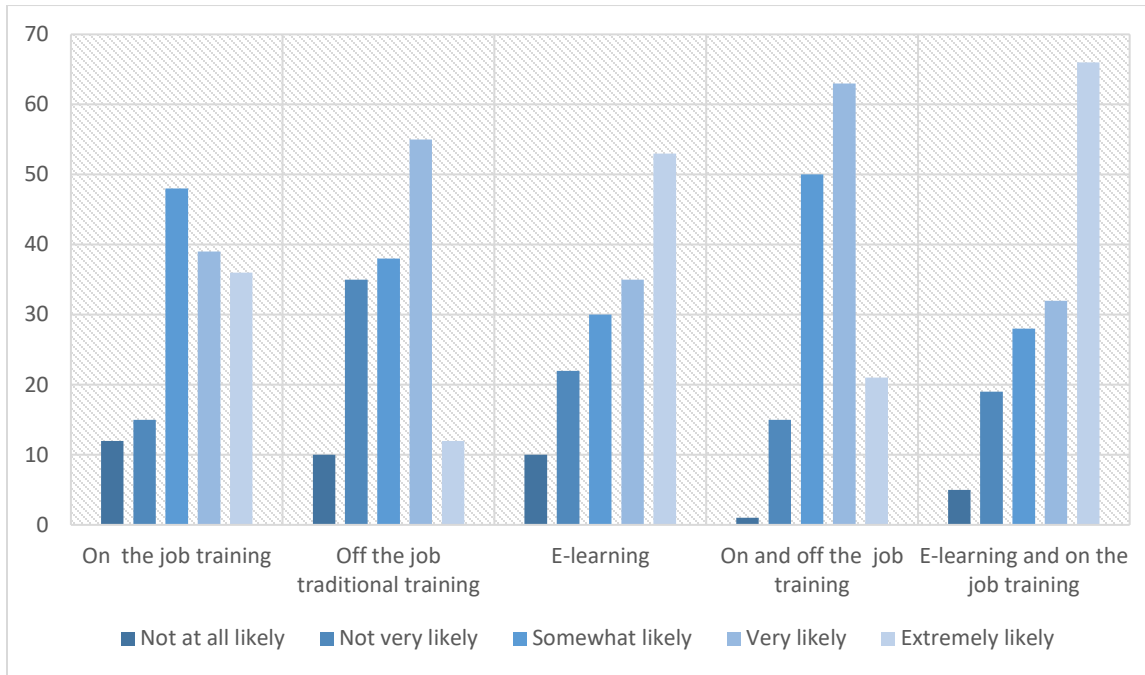

Chart 11

In the next question the employees who participated in the research had the opportunity to express their opinion about different types of training methods and through a scale to declare how much they prefer or not the different types of training. The first training method was the "on the job training" where exactly the half of the respondents (75 out 150 for both "very likely" and "extremely likely") said that they prefer this type of training, only 27 participants answered that they would not choose this method and 48 respondents answered "somewhat likely". The second method was the "off the job traditional training method" and the answers here were shared. 67 of the participants (both "very likely" and "extremely likely" answers) said that they would choose this type of training, 45 employees said that they would not choose this method and 38 employees answer "somewhat likely". The next method was the e-learning method where the author observes that the majority of the employees (88 out of 150) prefers this type of training. Small number of respondents said that they do not prefer e-learning and 30 employees said that they are neutral. The immediately after type of method was the combination of "on and off the job training (traditional methods)" where we notice the smallest number of employees who do not prefer this combination (only 16 participants answered "not at all likely" and "not very likely"). 50 out of 150 answered "somewhat likely". 84 employees said that they would choose this combination of methods. The last method was a combination between "e-learning and on the job training". Worth to mention is the fact that this combination is the most preferable method of training as 98 participants answer that they would choose this training method (66 respondents answered "extremely likely"). To sum up, question 11 reveals that the employees prefer combination of training methods and especially the "e-learning and on the job training". This is logical because a combination of training methods offers a complete training which make

them feel confident to take on their duties. On the contrary, the method that gather the majority of "not likely" answers were the "off the job traditional training".

"In your opinion, what would be the effectiveness level of the following e-learning types?"
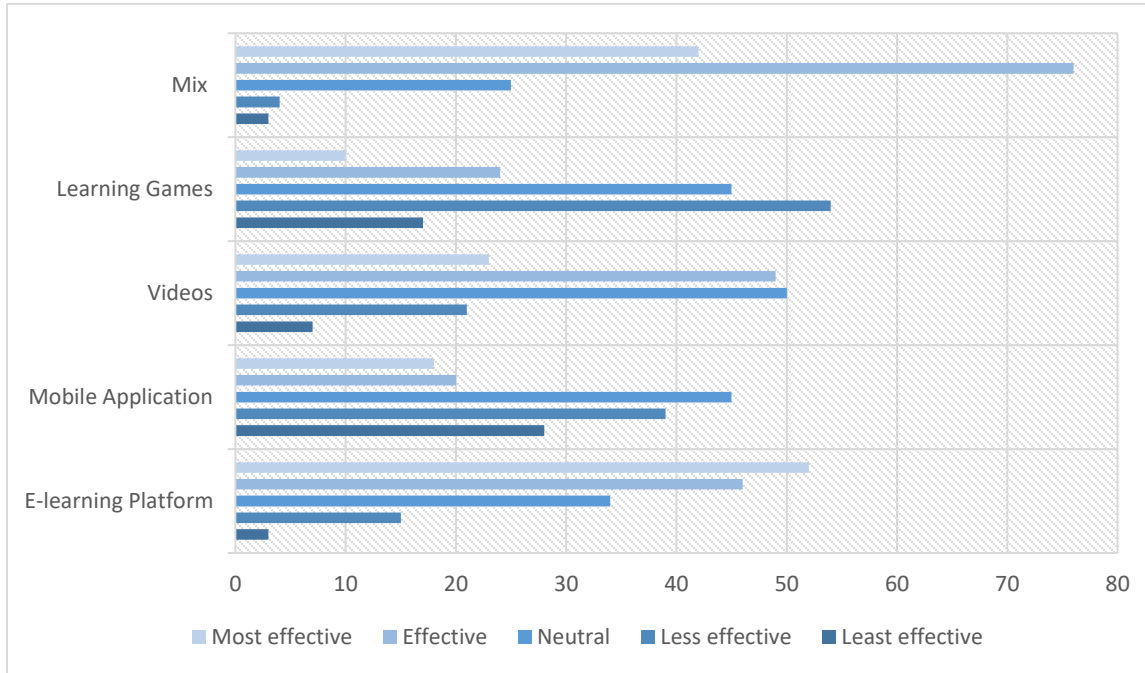

Chart12

The following question asked the participants to mark the effectiveness of the following e-learning types from the most effective to the least effective (Chart 12). The first type was the e-learning platform which the majority of employees(98 out of 150 answer "most effective" and "effective") characterized as an effective type of training, 34 employees answered "neutral" and only 18 participants believe that e-learning is not an effective type. The next type was the mobile application which marked as ineffective from the majority of the employees (67 out of 150 answered "less effective" and "least effective"). Also, 45 respondents characterized it as "neutral" and only 38 participants said that it is an effective type of e-learning. Contrary to mobile application, the videos as a type of e-learning training method portrayed as an effective method (72 out of 150 answered "effective" and "most effective") and 50 participants described it as "neutral". The next type was the learning games which depicted as an ineffective type of e-learning method (71 out of 150 answered "less effective" and "least" effective"). 45 of the participants characterized it as "neutral" and 44 as "effective". The last method was a combination of all the other of e-learning methods (Mixed method) which, as expected, concentrated the majority of "effective" and "most effective" answers (118 out of 150). Only 7 of the participants characterized it ineffective and 25 "neutral". To sum up, it is obvious that the

employees believe that a combination of all the e-learning types is the most effective type of an e-learning training.

	Confidence after E-learning
Mean	3,90
Standard Error	0,09
Median	4,00
Mode	5,00
Standard Deviation	1,14
Sample Variance	1,30
Kurtosis	-0,34
Skewness	-0,77
Range	4,00
Minimum	1,00
Maximum	5,00
Sum	585,00
Count	150,00

Picture 2

Looking the chart above, we see that the "mean" possible confidence after receiving e-learning training is 3.90 (from the scale 1: not at all to 5: very much). So, the result lies closer to 4 and we may conclude that employees would feel confident to take on their position duties after receiving an e-learning training.
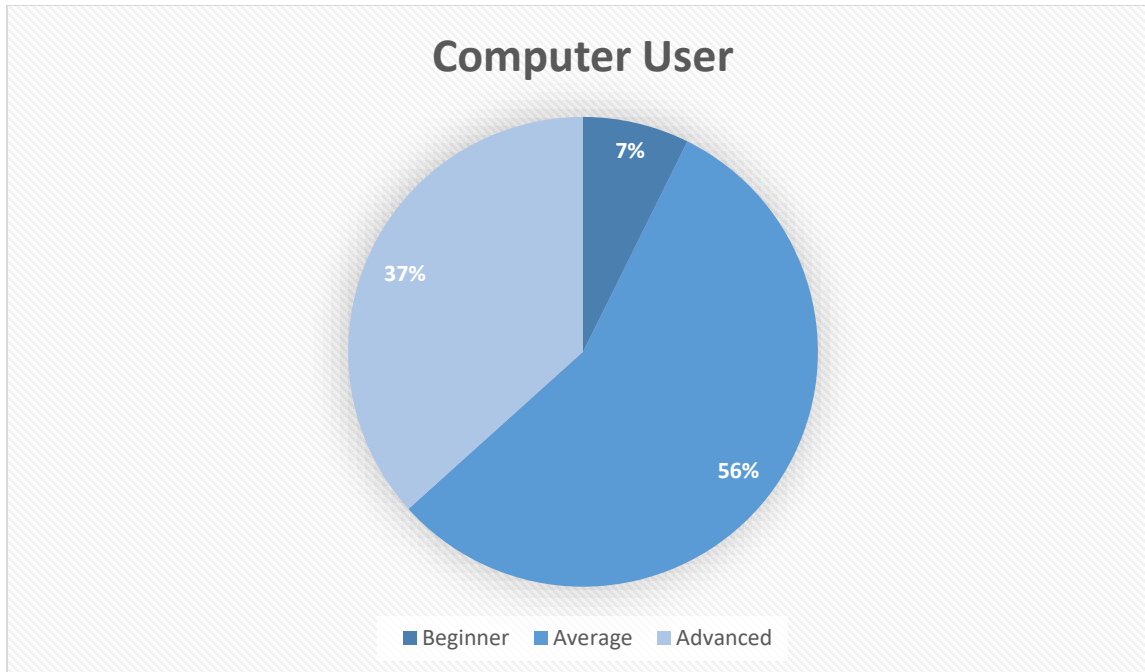
Computer User

- 7%
- 37%
- 56%

Beginner ■ Average ■ Advanced

Chart 13

The last question asked the participants of the research to characterize themselves as computer users (see Chart 13). They had to choose between three choices (beginner – average – advanced) and more than a half of them (56%) answered that they are "average users", the 37% answered that they are "advanced users" and only the 7% of the respondents characterized themselves as "beginner users". So, it is obvious that the great majority of employees at 4* and 5* Greek hotels are familiar with the use of computers. The purpose of this question was to discover if the employees in Greek tourism industry are accustomed with the use of personal computer which is appropriate in order to apply the e-learning as a training method.

Main Findings and Recommendations

An extensive research has been carried out in purpose of answering: i)if the seasonal employees at 4* and 5* Greek hotels receive efficient training before they take on their duties?, ii)what percentage of them have received e-learning as a training method?, iii)which type of training they prefer mostly?, iv) if they believe that e-learning could be an effective and efficient training method? and v) which type of e-learning did they consider as the most effective? When the results of the responses are investigated, it is indicated that not even the half of the participants (see chart 6) agree that they have received training before the starting of the season and the vast majority of them received only one to five days traditional type of training which the employees believe that it is not enough to make them feel confident to take on their duties. The results show that the largest group of employers provide accommodation to their employees during the training period and about 1/3 employers pays and offers nutrition to their staff during the training period. Of course, the expenses for the accommodation and nutrition are huge especially for

29

those hotels that they employ big number of staff. Now, according to the use of e-learning as a training method, almost the 84% of the employees answer that they have never received e-learning for their training but almost 67% of the respondents answer that they would be ready to take on their duties if they have first received e-learning training. In the question that urges the participants to answer which type of training they prefer mostly, the choices that gather the most positive answers were the "combination of e-learning and on the job training" and the "e-learning''. The research shows clearly the preference of the employees to the e-learning method for their training.

The lack of financial resources, time and knowledge in the combination with the unwillingness to invest in training are some of the main barriers that prevent hoteliers from moving forward to the incorporation of the e-learning as the core method of the staff training. Investing in e-learning will give the opportunity to hoteliers to save on costs like accommodation and nutrition for the training period, to solve some of the human resources issues such as high staff turnover (which is so commonplace in the Greek hospitality industry) and to overcome management challenges and issues. Furthermore, the provision of consistent and accurate content at the right time through e-learning can support effective training and help managers and employees to acquire the appropriate knowledge and skills. During that period where the dangers for the public health are many, the hospitality and tourism industry in cooperation with government, universities and private sector should devote time and money in research and development of the online learning technology along with its delivery and service. Of course, on the job training could not be replaced by e-learning training but its combination will create better conditions and reduce the training period and the expenses that are created. For example, in front office department the conversation and meetings between the receptionists and the manager could be achieved through an on-line application such as zoom, also, the property management system (PMS) could be learned and practiced from the receptionists through e-learning system (where a demo of the PMS could be installed in the Personal Computer of every employee) and videos-tutorials that will show the application of the program. As stated above, *"if we can show our workforce the way to do something, and if the video is relatively short (ideally under 3 minutes), we are going to more likely see improvements in their day-to-day performance. Video production does not cost a fortune. Today, instructors and managers around the world are taking matters into their own hands and producing lo-fi, but equally effective video-based courses. Sometimes we were able to achieve greater results with a $100 camera by filming ourselves or colleagues than with a $5,000 training program that goes on forever (Azzopardi, 2018)".* In food and beverage department the menus of food and drinks could be sent to the waiters in the form of a digitalized catalogue which contains photos, descriptions, recipes etc. The conversations and the meetings between the team could be done via online platforms, the payment system could be learned through tutorial videos, furthermore live-streaming could be useful for the depiction of the appropriate way to service the clients or for the depiction of cooking recipes to the employees in kitchen. Typically, information for the induction of new employees in tourism and hospitality sector like history of the organization, appearance standards (uniforms and dress codes), health and safety measures, rules and regulations of the company, pay systems and benefits should be electronically delivered to the staff. Employees in reservation and accounting department should

be trained from their homes through emulations of the reservation or accounting systems – programs. Last but not least, one of the most important benefits of the e-learning training is the opportunity of the organization to evaluate the knowledge that the trainees received in order to give them feedbacks (of course feedbacks for the training programs could be also delivered from the trainees to the instructors for the improvement of the training programs). There are a number of methods for the evaluation of the e-learning training, such as : electronic questionnaires, structured exercises and case studies via online systems (where trainees have to apply their learned skills and techniques) and electronic tests or examinations (which are useful for checking the trainees progress). As aforementioned in the section of the Literature Review, gamification is one of the game-changers in e-learning, especially when it comes to staff evaluation. *"By leveraging positive reinforcement, healthy competition, and rewards workers can find themselves enjoying the experience far more than first anticipated. The explanation is straightforward, once we reward people for their efforts, the result is often a growing trust in management and the system in general"* (Azzopardi, 2018*).* It would be really fruitful for the evaluation of the e-learning progress, the establishment of a mobile-friendly and online game which tests the acquired knowledge of the employees and gives the managers the opportunity to find out the skills level of each of their potential employees so as to focus on the weaknesses of each of them and prevent possible future on-the-job obstacles.

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Appendix

Application of E-learning in the training of seasonal employees of 4* and 5* Greek hotels.

Dear participant,

My name is Vasileios Sioulas, I am a Master student of Tourism Management at International Hellenic University and this is a questionnaire conducted for purpose of my dissertation.

I am inviting you to participate in this research study by completing the attached survey which requires approximately 5 minutes of your time. If you choose to participate in this project, please answer all questions as honestly as possible.

The data collected will provide useful information regarding the application of E-Learning in the training of seasonal employees of 4* and 5* hotels of Greece.

If you require additional information or have questions or would like a summary copy of this study please contact me at the email listed below.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors!

Sincerely,

Vasileios Sioulas
v.sioulas@ihu.edu.gr
*Required

1.   1. Gender *

Mark only one oval.

◯ Female

◯ Male

2.   2. Which range includes your age? *

Mark only one oval.

◯ 18-30

◯ 31-50

◯ 50 plus

3.   3. Education (highest degree or level of school you completed; if currently enrolled, indicate highest degree received): *

Mark only one oval.

◯ High School

◯ Bachelor

◯ Master

◯ PhD

4.   4. How many years of working experience in 4* and 5*Greek hotels you have? *

Mark only one oval.

◯ 1-2 years

◯ 3-5 years

◯ More than 5 years

5.   5. Which department you are in? *

Mark only one oval.

◯ Front office

◯ F&B

◯ Housekeeping

◯ Administration

◯ Maintenance

6.   6. "I have received training before seasonal opening": *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

7.   7. How much time did your previous job training last? *

Mark only one oval.

◯ No training

◯ 1-5 days

◯ 5-10 days

◯ More than 10 days

8.   8. Describe the last training you received in terms of the following statements: *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
During the training, my employer provided me with nutrition	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
During the training, my employer provided me with accommodation	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
The training was paid	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
The training was consisted of traditional methods like scripts and role playning	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
After the training, I felt confident and ready to take on my position duties	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

9.   9. Have you ever received E-learning, as a form of your seasonal job training? *

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Yes

    ◯ No

10.   10. If yes, please be more specific:

    _____

11.   11. In case you had the option to choose your training, which one you would likely choose? Rank them from 1 for "not at all likely" to 5 for "extremely likely". *

    Mark only one oval per row.

	1	2	3	4	5
On the job training	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Off the job traditional training (scripts, role playing etc.)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
E-learning	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Combination of on and off the job traditional training	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Combination of e-learning and on the job training	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

12. 12. In your opinion, what would be the effectiveness level of the following e-learning types? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Least effective	Less effective	Neutral	Effective	Most effective
E-learning platform	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Mobile application	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Videos	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Learning games	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Mix of all the above	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

13. 13. Would you feel confident and ready to take on your position duties, after receiving e-learning training? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Totally

14. 14. "I would describe myself as a computer user": *

Mark only one oval.

◯ Begginer
◯ Average
◯ Advanced

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