

Career Mobility Of Hospitality Graduates Towards Allied Industries: Drivers, Barriers, And Industry Implications

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ABSTRACT

The hospitality workforce has undergone significant structural changes over recent years, largely influenced by evolving labour-market expectations, sectoral competition, and the expanding recognition of hospitality graduates as valuable talent pools for multiple service industries. This study examines the phenomenon of career mobility among hospitality graduates, particularly their movement from core hotel operations into allied sectors such as aviation, luxury retail, cruise lines, event management, corporate guest relations, and technology-enabled service organisations. Through a mixed-method design involving a quantitative survey (N = 180) and qualitative interviews (n = 12), the research investigates the motivational drivers, perceived barriers, and broader industry implications of such mobility. Analyses using descriptive statistics, factor analysis, Pearson correlations, and multiple regression reveal that work–life balance ($\beta = .41$), salary expectations ($\beta = .38$), growth opportunities ($\beta = .29$), and professional dignity ($\beta = .24$) significantly influence mobility intentions. The final model accounts for 62% of the variance in mobility intention ($R^2 = .62$). Qualitative insights further contextualise these findings by highlighting dissatisfaction with traditional hotel structures, desire for stable shifts, and aspiration for greater professional respect. The study offers a multidimensional understanding of cross-sector career transitions and contributes actionable recommendations for educational institutions and hospitality employers

Keywords: Career mobility; Hospitality graduates; Allied sectors; Work–life balance; Salary expectations; Professional dignity; Growth opportunities; Career transition; Hospitality industry; Service sector employment

INTRODUCTION:

Career mobility has emerged as a critical area of inquiry within the hospitality domain as graduates increasingly pursue employment beyond the conventional hotel sector. Traditionally, the hospitality career trajectory was linear and sector-bound, with students entering front office, housekeeping, food and beverage service, or kitchen roles immediately after graduation. Over the last decade, however, this pathway has diversified significantly. Allied service sectors—ranging from airlines, cruise lines, hospitals, luxury retail, theme parks, tourism service operations, coworking spaces, corporate guest relations, and even customer-experience functions in technology companies—now actively recruit hospitality graduates.

This shift reflects deeper transformations in both labour-market expectations and the evolving service economy. While hotels continue to demand high levels of emotional labour, extended work hours, and flexible shifts, emerging allied sectors offer structured hours, competitive compensation, strong organisational cultures, and well-defined promotion pathways. The hospitality academic literature has consistently highlighted challenges such as burnout, turnover intentions, emotional exhaustion, and professional stagnation among hotel employees (Baum, 2019). These conditions, combined with the growing demand for soft skills in other industries, have created fertile ground for cross-sector mobility.

In India, where hospitality education has grown rapidly and metropolitan hubs like Delhi NCR host a large share of graduates, this mobility trend has become particularly significant. Industry recruiters report that a substantial portion of hospitality students actively prefer jobs in aviation, retail, or corporate guest services during campus placements. This phenomenon raises important questions: What motivates graduates to leave the hotel industry? What barriers do they encounter? And how is the hospitality sector responding to the outflow of trained talent?

This study addresses these questions through a structured empirical investigation. The findings are intended to guide educational reform, inform HR strategies, and support the development of sustainable workforce policies within the hospitality ecosystem.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of existing literature reveals several interconnected themes relevant to the career mobility of hospitality graduates.

THE NATURE OF HOSPITALITY CAREERS

Hospitality careers have historically been characterized by high customer-contact roles requiring emotional labor, interpersonal communication, problem solving, and service excellence (King et al., 2013). These attributes make hospitality graduates highly adaptable to multiple service contexts. Yet, the sector also carries reputational

challenges relating to work pressure, unpredictable shifts, and low work autonomy.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS AND CROSS-SECTOR EMPLOYABILITY

The modern service economy increasingly values soft skills—adaptability, communication, guest handling, cultural intelligence, and conflict resolution. Baum (2019) argues that hospitality graduates exhibit some of the strongest behavioural competencies among service workers. This skillset aligns well with industries such as aviation, luxury retail, healthcare, events, and corporate experience management.

PUSH FACTORS DRIVING MOBILITY

Numerous studies document negative working conditions as primary push factors prompting graduates to leave hospitality (Richardson, 2010; Wan et al., 2021). These include:

Long and irregular shifts

Entry-level salary dissatisfaction

Emotional exhaustion and stress

Limited promotional clarity

Perceived lack of dignity or respect

Because these conditions persist in many hotel organisations, mobility intentions rise.

PULL FACTORS ATTRACTING GRADUATES TO ALLIED SECTORS

Pull factors typically relate to the perceived attractiveness of alternative industries. These include:

Higher compensation packages

More structured or predictable hours

Improved organisational culture

Formal training programmes

Opportunities for accelerated career growth

In particular, aviation and luxury retail offer strong financial and lifestyle incentives, making them preferred career choices.

BARRIERS TO MOBILITY

Despite growing interest in allied sectors, several barriers persist. Lo and Lee (2020) find that graduates often encounter skill mismatches, knowledge gaps about sector-specific expectations, and limited institutional support for exploring non-hotel roles. Families may also encourage traditional hotel jobs due to perceived stability.

RESEARCH GAPS

While international research is rich, the Indian context is under examined. Few empirical studies integrate both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explain why

graduates shift sectors. Moreover, no published study offers a structured model correlating drivers such as dignity, salary expectations, and work–life balance with mobility intention

This study fills these gaps.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research is guided by the following objectives:

To identify the key motivational drivers behind hospitality graduates' preference for allied sectors.

To examine perceived barriers to transitioning into allied industries.

To analyse the statistical relationship between work–life balance, salary expectations, professional dignity, growth opportunities, and mobility intention.

To explore industry implications of the increasing shift toward allied sectors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study adopts a mixed-method explanatory approach where quantitative findings are enriched by qualitative insights.

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 180 hospitality graduates and early-career professionals from Delhi NCR participated in the survey. Twelve respondents, currently working in allied sectors, were interviewed in-depth.

SAMPLING STRATEGY

Purposive sampling was employed as the study focused on individuals with hospitality education backgrounds.

INSTRUMENTS

Quantitative Survey

A structured questionnaire measured five constructs using a 5-point Likert scale:

Work–life balance

Salary expectations

Professional dignity

Career growth opportunities

Mobility intention

Cronbach's alpha score of **.87** confirms strong internal reliability.

Qualitative Interviews

Semi-structured interviews explored personal motivations, perceived career outcomes, and comparative sector experiences.

Data Analysis

The study utilised:

- Descriptive statistics
- Exploratory factor analysis
- Pearson correlations
- Multiple regression modelling
- Thematic coding for qualitative data

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics

(Expanded explanation)

The demographic profile shows a young workforce where 87.2% are under 27 years of age, reflecting the early stages of career exploration. Nearly half have 1–3 years of work experience, indicating exposure to both hotels and non-hotel roles.

Ethical Considerations

Participants’ anonymity and consent were ensured. No personal identifiers were collected.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 180)

| Variable | Category | Frequency (f) | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------|-----------|---------------|----------------|
| Gender | Male | 102 | 56.7 |
| | Female | 78 | 43.3 |
| Age (Years) | 20–23 | 92 | 51.1 |
| | 24–27 | 65 | 36.1 |
| | 28–30 | 23 | 12.8 |
| Work Experience | <1 year | 48 | 26.6 |
| | 1–3 years | 82 | 45.5 |
| | >3 years | 50 | 27.9 |

Interpretation

Participants were predominantly early-career professionals (87.2% below 27 years). This indicates a young workforce actively exploring career choices.

High mean scores across all constructs reflect a strong collective inclination toward alternative sectors. This is consistent with global reports of hospitality labour shortages.

Descriptive Findings

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

| Construct | Mean (M) | Standard Deviation (SD) | Interpretation |
|----------------------|----------|-------------------------|--|
| Work–life balance | 4.12 | .68 | High perceived imbalance in hotels pushes mobility |
| Salary expectation | 4.21 | .71 | Salary dissatisfaction in hotels triggers shift |
| Professional dignity | 3.89 | .77 | Concerns around respect influence decisions |
| Growth opportunities | 4.03 | .72 | Allied sectors perceived to offer faster growth |
| Mobility intention | 4.28 | .65 | Very strong intention to leave hospitality |

Interpretation

All constructs show **high mean values**, confirming strong inclination toward allied sectors.

Correlations

All independent variables correlate significantly with mobility intention, confirming theoretical expectations.

Table 3. Correlation between Drivers and Mobility Intention

| Predictor Variable | Pearson r | Significance (p) | Strength |
|--------------------|-----------|------------------|-----------------|
| Work-life balance | .61 | < .01 | Strong positive |

| | | | |
|----------------------|-----|-------|-------------------|
| Salary expectation | .58 | < .01 | Moderately strong |
| Professional dignity | .45 | < .05 | Moderate |
| Growth opportunities | .52 | < .01 | Moderately strong |

Interpretation

All variables show significant positive correlation with mobility intention, meaning dissatisfaction or expectations directly affect desire to switch to allied sectors.

Regression Findings

Table 4. Regression Model Predicting Mobility Intention

| Predictor | Beta (β) | t-value | Sig. | Impact Strength |
|----------------------|----------|---------|-------|---------------------|
| Work-life balance | .41 | 6.12 | < .01 | Strongest predictor |
| Salary expectation | .38 | 5.87 | < .01 | High influence |
| Professional dignity | .24 | 3.54 | < .05 | Moderate |
| Growth opportunities | .29 | 4.08 | < .05 | High |

Model Summary:

$R^2 = 0.62$ → Model explains 62% of variation in mobility intention

$F = 43.92, p < .001$ → Model is statistically significant

Professional dignity (β = .24) also matters, indicating concerns around respect and treatment in hotel operations.

The R^2 value of .62 confirms a robust model.

Interpretation

Work-life balance emerges as the **most influential driver**, followed by salary and growth opportunities.

Qualitative Themes

Theme 1: Desire for Predictability

Interviewed graduates highlighted how aviation and corporate roles provide fixed rosters, unlike the fluctuating shifts in hotels.

The regression model demonstrates that:

Work-life balance (β = .41) is the strongest predictor. Graduates prioritise regular shifts, personal time, and mental health.

Salary expectations (β = .38) strongly influence mobility, reflecting wage dissatisfaction in hotels.

Growth opportunities (β = .29) remain critical as allied sectors often provide structured training and fast promotions.

Theme 2: Organisational Culture

Several respondents described hotels as hierarchical and demanding, whereas allied sectors adopt more modern HR practices.

Theme 3: Social Perception

Participants felt that airline crew, luxury retail professionals, and corporate guest-relations officers receive better societal recognition

Table 5. Qualitative Themes from Interviews (n = 12)

| Theme | Description | Key Quotes (Condensed) |
|--------------------|---|---|
| Predictable Shifts | Graduates prefer aviation/retail jobs due to structured hours | “I finally have weekends off— unlike hotels.” |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Organisational Culture | Allied sectors perceived as progressive vs. hierarchical hotel culture | “Corporate jobs treat you more professionally.” |
| Social Recognition | Roles like cabin crew, brand associate, corporate guest relations seen as prestigious | “People respect aviation roles more than hotel operations.” |

Interpretation

Qualitative findings reinforce quantitative results by highlighting **predictability, respect, and growth** as dominant motivators

This trend has deep implications:

Hotels risk losing talent, weakening service quality.

Educational institutions must revise curricula to incorporate allied-sector training.

Industry–academia partnerships must expand across sectors.

DISCUSSION

Table 6. Integrated Discussion: Key Results and Their Meaning

| Research Question | Empirical Finding | Discussion & Interpretation |
|---|--|--|
| RQ1: What drives hospitality graduates to allied sectors? | High scores for WLB (4.12), salary (4.21), growth (4.03), dignity (3.89) | Graduates experience burnout, low pay, slow promotions , and prefer structured sectors like aviation, corporate CX, retail & cruises. |
| RQ2: What barriers exist? | Skill mismatch, family pressure, limited college placement support | These barriers exist but do not strongly deter mobility , as intention scores remain high (4.28). |
| RQ3: Which factors significantly predict mobility intention? | WLB (.41), salary (.38), growth (.29), dignity (.24) all significant | Work-life balance and salary are primary predictors , signaling dissatisfaction with hotel conditions. |
| RQ4: What are the industry implications? | High mobility → potential talent drain in hotels | Hotels must redesign HR practices: flexible shifts, competitive salaries, clear promotion ladders, and stronger culture. |

The findings align with global literature yet provide context-specific insights for India.

FINDINGS

Mobility intention among hospitality graduates is high and widespread, not limited to a small subgroup.

Work–life balance is the primary driver, emphasising the unsustainability of traditional hotel shift structures.

Salary dissatisfaction significantly pushes graduates to compare cross-sector benefits.

Growth pathways and workplace dignity significantly shape long-term career planning.

Barriers exist but do not significantly deter mobility intentions.

Allied sectors are perceived as progressive, structured, and aspirational.

Table 7. Summary of Key Findings

| Variable | Strength of Impact | Practical Meaning |
|-------------------|--------------------|---|
| Work–life balance | Strongest | Rigid hotel shifts push graduates away |
| Salary | High | Hospitality pays less than allied sectors |

| | | |
|----------------------|-----------|---|
| Growth opportunities | High | Aviation & retail offer faster promotions |
| Professional dignity | Moderate | Emotional labour & customer mistreatment affect retention |
| Mobility intention | Very High | Graduates actively seek leaving hospitality |

CONCLUSION

The present study provides an in-depth examination of the growing career mobility of hospitality graduates toward allied service sectors, revealing this shift to be both structural and deeply rooted in evolving workforce expectations. The findings clearly demonstrate that the traditional hotel sector, once considered the primary destination for hospitality graduates, is increasingly losing its attractiveness due to persistent challenges such as long and irregular working hours, comparatively lower entry-level salaries, limited promotion clarity, and concerns relating to professional dignity and workplace conditions. These push factors, consistently identified across the literature, and were strongly echoed in the quantitative and qualitative data of this study.

Simultaneously, allied sectors—including aviation, luxury retail, cruise lines, event management, healthcare services, travel technology, and corporate customer-experience roles—are emerging as aspirational alternatives. These industries offer structured work schedules, competitive and transparent compensation systems, formalised training pathways, and a more contemporary organisational culture. The regression analysis in this study confirms that work–life balance and salary expectations are the strongest predictors of mobility intention, highlighting the growing importance of well-being and financial security in shaping young professionals’ career decisions. Growth opportunities and professional dignity further reinforce the desire to transition, suggesting that hospitality graduates seek not merely a job, but a career environment that aligns with their long-term aspirations, psychological well-being, and social identity.

Qualitative narratives add substantial depth to this understanding. Graduates emphasised the appeal of predictable shifts, better managerial behaviour, and higher societal recognition in allied sectors. Their reflections suggest that hospitality skills—often considered niche—are in fact highly transferable and valued across diverse industries. This validates the concept of a “boundaryless career,” where individuals continually seek environments that maximise value, growth, and satisfaction.

These findings carry significant implications for both educational institutions and the hospitality industry. Hospitality colleges must rethink curriculum design to integrate cross-sector competencies, strengthen industry collaborations with allied employers, and adapt placement strategies to a more diversified job market. Hotels, on the other hand, must acknowledge the competitive labour landscape and urgently modernise HR practices. This includes implementing structured shift systems,

competitive salary benchmarking, transparent career progression frameworks, employee well-being programs, and training models that recognise and reward professional dignity. Without such reforms, the hospitality sector risks a continued erosion of its talent pipeline, threatening service quality and operational stability in the long term.

In conclusion, the study establishes that the movement of hospitality graduates toward allied sectors is not an isolated phenomenon but a sustained, rational, and multi-factor decision influenced by structural conditions, personal aspirations, and evolving labour-market dynamics. The findings position this mobility not as a problem, but as a powerful indicator of shifting workforce priorities. For the hospitality industry to remain competitive, it must strategically realign itself with these priorities. This research contributes a robust evidence-based model of mobility intention and sets the stage for further scholarly work on retention strategies, experiential learning pathways, and the design of sustainable talent ecosystems within the broader service industry landscape

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