
Leadership Lab: Building Emotional Intelligence and Resilience Through Experiential Learning

Abstract:

The Leadership Lab is a four-day experiential learning programme at Hotelschool The Hague, preparing students for their role as Department Managers in the Managing the Outlets (MO) course. Students lead peers through challenging assignments, focusing on emotional intelligence (EQ), resilience, and reflective practice. As members of Gen Z—often linked to rising mental health challenges—students are supported in developing the resilience and leadership skills needed for today’s complex world. Each assignment is evaluated on both process and outcome. We are currently integrating the Inner Development Goals (IDG) framework to further enhance personal growth and leadership development.

Key Words Leadership, Resilience, Experience Based Learning, Gen Z, Emotional Intelligence, Inner Development Goals

Theme: Innovative didactics in teaching

Kind of submission: Idea Pitch for Lecturers’ Lounge

Introduction

Tomorrow’s hospitality leaders must do more than manage operations—they must lead with empathy, emotional intelligence, and resilience. At Hotelschool The Hague, third-year students begin their leadership journey by guiding first-year students in operational outlets. This journey starts with the Leadership Lab, a four-day outdoor training programme. Working in groups of 12, students complete a variety of physical and mental challenges in an unfamiliar environment, aimed at developing leadership skills and resilience.

Managing the Outlets (MO)

In the Managing the Outlets (MO) course, students act as Department Managers in Food & Beverage or Rooms Division outlets. The course develops key leadership skills: motivating teams, building trust-based, ethical and culturally sensitive relationships, adapting leadership styles, self-reflection, leveraging personal strengths and values.

The course alternates between practical and theoretical weeks. Students develop self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management skills. In earlier years, the focus is on being a good team member; in MO, it shifts to leading teams and facilitating team development.

The Leadership Lab

Before MO begins, students participate in the Leadership Lab. Groups of 12 students from both campuses engage in six outdoor challenges over four days—such as long hikes, building bivouacs, and complex team assignments. Many students work with unfamiliar peers and experience camping or fire-making for the first time.

Each assignment is followed by an evaluation with a trainer, where the team reflects on the assignment and students receive feedback on how their behavior influenced team performance. This builds self-awareness and team dynamics understanding. During the evaluations models like AID (feedback), GROW (coaching), Situational Leadership, Tuckman’s Group Development are used to enhance their reflection and learning. Trainers adapt the theory and activities to each group’s needs, always ensuring psychological safety. During the Leadership Lab students go through Kolb’s Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984).

Building Gen Z Resilience

Defined as “the maintenance or quick recovery of mental health during or after adversity” (Kalisch et al., 2017), resilience is essential in high-pressure service environments such as the hospitality industry. As Gen Z faces increasing mental health challenges (OECD, 2025), developing their resilience is more critical than ever. The Leadership Lab supports this by placing students in real, demanding situations that foster growth and adaptability.

Introducing the IDG Framework

We are now exploring the Inner Development Goals (IDG) framework to strengthen resilience training. Already adopted by companies like IKEA and Google, the IDG framework aligns with our goals to develop future-ready leaders equipped for today’s VUCA world (Jordan, 2021). Over the coming months, we’ll experiment with new interventions to further support our students’ resilience.

Conclusion

At EuroCHRIE’s Lecturer’s Lounge, we aim to share our long-standing Leadership Lab programme and our current innovations—particularly around Gen Z resilience and the integration of the IDG framework

References

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