

A case study exploration of the social impacts of a UK local, provincial casino on key stakeholder groups

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Executive summary

This report has been funded by the Southlands Methodist Trust and has been conducted by a research team from the University of Roehampton Business School, Dr Guy Bohane and Professor Yvonne Guerrier. The report is a single case study exploration of the social impacts of a UK local, provincial casino on key stakeholder groups. Stakeholder groups have been identified using Fassin's (2009) Stakeholder Model. This qualitative research aims to advance understanding of different stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes towards casino gambling, especially post The Gambling Act 2005. Some of the subtle social challenges of running and managing a casino in a challenging multi-cultural urban environment are addressed. The project was based on 27 interviews with casino staff, senior management at the Rank Group as well as other local stakeholders.

The key findings and results of the research are reported under three main headings:

- The management of staff and staff attitudes
- The Rank Group's social responsibility policies and practices
- The casino within the context of Luton

In relation to the management of staff and staff attitudes, the question of a casino as a general entertainment venue was addressed. The nature of working within a casino identified the different specialist types of work namely those linked directly with the gambling and those with more general hospitality roles. It was interesting to note that although the work was 'convenient', many staff interviewed had been in the job in Luton for many years.

Many of the staff had considerable technical skills particularly the dealers, although most emphasise customer service skills as being more important. They saw their task as managing the customer 'experience' which is challenging over extended periods of several hours. The stressful nature of the job emerged in relation to 'emotional labour' where staff were essentially paid to manage their own emotions for the benefit of the customer especially since the casino was open 24 hours in a day. What also emerged in the research was the highly supportive work culture and strong leadership especially in relation to customers who became difficult especially when alcohol was involved as well as when dealing with 'problem gamblers'. Within the highly regulated environment of the casino, the question of surveillance and monitoring was seen positively by staff as a form of protection as opposed to being oppressive. As a result, staff were motivated to intervene in difficult situations not just because they were required to, but also because of genuine care for the customers. The introduction of 24 hour opening had a mixed response from staff, with some seeing it as positive as it had regularised shifts, others saw it difficult in being able to socialise outside work and they were 'stuck' in work.

The Rank Group's social responsibility policies and practices were considered particularly in relation to their commitment towards 'integrity and legitimacy', and their pledges towards key stakeholder groups were discussed. The Group has clearly defined policies and procedures in the management of responsible gaming. The staff were given extensive training and had a high level of awareness in relation to recognising 'problem gamblers', and also customers are encouraged to address their own gambling habits through initiatives such as 'Stay in Control'. Rank consider that there needed to be a balance struck between managing and supervising a safe environment for the gambling and developing 'entertainment', both of which they managed highly effectively according to many different stakeholder groups interviewed. As a commercial business, the question of commitments towards business imperatives was addressed. Staff in particular saw the business as successful both as a venue as well as for the town. The question of key stakeholder groups such as charities was also considered here. Rank supports and funds many charities and local support services some in the local area in Luton. All respondents interviewed considered that the casino was a safe and pleasant venue. None considered that casino gambling had a major effect particularly on local needy stakeholder groups such as those with debt problems.

In relation to the casino in Luton, many of those interviewed had mixed views about Luton as a town. Some considered it to be in a 'terrible mess' especially in relation to alcohol consumption. Others saw it as a safe town, and in particular the casino was considered to be a well-run venue and a pleasant place to go.

From the research a number of proposals are presented:

- There are concerns about the participation of young people in casino gambling, even though they may be attracted to the casino for 'entertainment'. More research needs to be undertaken to ensure that they are not vulnerable to addiction.
- The Rank Group should continue to question the definition and management of problem gambling beyond observing 'changes in behaviour'.
- Opening a casino for 24 hours a day may be viable on a financial basis, but clearly there are concerns about the impact of: unsociable shifts; work/life balance; the social life of staff; and the normalising of gambling over extended periods.
- The Rank Group could consider more active involvement and communication with the local charities that they fund to understand what the challenges are for those charities.

Introduction

The context of casino gambling in the UK

The introduction of the Gambling Act 2005 had brought about both opportunity and challenges for experienced operators such as the Rank Group. Prior to the Act, casinos could only exist if they could demonstrate they satisfied a demand. They had to be members' clubs and could only open between 2pm and 6am weekdays and until 4am on Sundays. Those wishing to play needed to wait 24 hours due to the membership rule. All these restrictions were removed by the Act.

The Act is underpinned by three main principles:

- Keeping Gambling crime free
- Making sure that gambling is fair and open
- Protecting children and vulnerable adults

May-Chahal et al (2007)

Kingma (2008) notes some changes in society which have allowed the liberalisation of gambling as represented in the 2005 Act to take place. Firstly, there has developed a liberal consensus that gambling is acceptable as an adult commercial-provided activity. So casinos have become to be marketed as entertainment venues available to all rather than as niche 'gambling' or 'gaming' venues. It is worth exploring exactly what is meant by gambling as entertainment. Effectively, what people are paying for is the excitement involved in the action of gambling: the thrill of doing it (any loss being the price of that thrill) (Goffman, 1967; Kingma, 2008; Cosgrave, 2010). Secondly, it has been recognised that casinos can bring economic benefits to the location. Thirdly, it is recognised that there are risks which need to be controlled and these are constructed as the risk of crime and the risk of addiction.

The central 'danger' of gambling as a form of entertainment is that the consumption of risk (the excitement of participating) becomes risky consumption (addiction). Regulation of gambling, in the UK as in many other countries, has worked on the assumption that there are a small proportion of gamblers who are 'problem gamblers' and that, as a condition of their licenses, operators need to have systems in place to identify and intervene to support these people.

There is a particular concern within in the Act for children and 'vulnerable adults'. In relation to children, Valentine (2008) undertook a literature review of children and young people's gambling on behalf of the Gambling Commission. The review was commissioned to summarise international evidence about children and young people's participation in different types of gambling; their motivations; the prevalence of problem gambling; and the harms caused to children by gambling. It is estimated that approximately 10-14% of young people are at risk of developing serious gambling problems and that between approximately 5-7% of young people are problem gamblers. Young (2006:20) considers that there are potential factors which may predispose a child or young person to become a problem gambler, such as heavy parental gambling, delinquency, regular illicit drug use and average-to-below average academic standards.

In relation to 'vulnerable adults', there is a concern for what are termed 'problem gamblers'. The Gambling Commission in their regular, in-depth, predominantly quantitative studies, assess the level of gambling in the UK. The most recent study, the Gambling Prevalence Survey 2010 aims to measure and estimate prevalence in all forms of gambling; to investigate socio-demographic factors associated with gambling and with problem gambling; it explores attitudes towards gambling; and provides comparisons between pre-and post-implementation of the Gambling Act 2005.

(The Gambling Prevalence Survey 2010:9)

It is interesting to note from the 2010 figures that problem gambling is particularly an issue for young men:

"As in previous years, problem gambling was higher among men than women and was associated with age. For both men and women, problem gambling estimates were higher among younger adults and lower among older adults. Among men, problem gambling estimates were 2.8% for those aged 16-34 and 0.4% among those aged 65-74. Among women, problem gambling estimates were 1.3% among those aged 16-24 and 0.2% among those aged 65-74".

(The Gambling Prevalence Survey 2010:77)

In response to the Act there were concerns expressed by The Royal College of Psychiatrists Moran (2007) in his submission to the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sports on the implementation of the Gambling Act 2005 highlighted areas of concern in relation to regulation and how aspects of commercial gambling leads to excess:

"It is generally agreed that the greater the availability of gambling, the larger will be the number of those that develop problems as a result of the excess. This especially so if the gambling is actively promoted".

(Moran 2007:4)

They also highlighted the problematic nature of 'responsible gaming' and question this concept as adopted by the industry:

"If the term 'responsible' is to have any meaning at all in relation to gambling, it must imply moderation. However, the way in which it is increasingly being used is in terms of advice, education and "treatment", while, at the same time cultivating fantasies of large wins and dubious ways of achieving these".

(*ibid* 2007:4)

Reith (2007) undertook an influential research report which investigated the social impacts on gambling in Scotland. She considered that the understanding of the social impact of gambling is limited by a serious lack of high quality research. The many studies on gambling have produced inconclusive or contradictory results and this only exacerbates the controversy that surrounds gambling. She considers that both the negative and positive effects of gambling tend to be overstated, and that the evidence base shows that casinos are neither beneficial in terms of wealth creation, new jobs and regeneration, nor damaging in terms of the creation of massive social problems through increases in problem gambling and crime.

Some commentators question whether framing gambling regulation in terms of the protection of a small number of problem gamblers is helpful. Cosgrave (2010) notes that although gambling is no longer generally viewed as a sin or a vice, the language of 'problem gambling' effectively reframes moral concerns about gambling (Cosgrave, 2010). Contemporary society expects individuals to take personal responsibility for managing their gambling behaviour, in the same way as they should manage their alcohol consumption or food consumption: and problem gamblers have failed to do this. As Cosgrave (2010) also suggests, talking about 'responsible gambling' and implying that everyone is at 'risk' of becoming a problem gambler, also implies that there is really no 'normal' gambling. Ways of thinking about and regulating commercial gambling are therefore about compromise and contradiction. Operators have no choice but to have policies in place to respond to problem gambling.

The development of Casinos as general entertainment venues means they have become part of the 'night-time economy' offer in many towns and cities. As towns and cities have lost their industrial base, they have attempted to re-invent themselves as sites of leisure (Hannighan, 1988) with leisure venues now providing many of the employment opportunities. It is useful to view the development of casinos, such as the G Casino in Luton, in the context of the development of a "night-time leisure economy" in towns and cities across the UK (Hobbs et al, 2000). Hobbs et al, (2000) show how, in their attempt to compete with other urban centres, local governments have become more entrepreneurial and more focused on the commercial potential of developments. The emphasis has switched from control and regulation to one of facilitation in the context of a more liberal licensing strategy. However, this strategy has not been without its problems. The first question is whether the leisure economy actually creates as many jobs as it promises; and if it does create jobs what is the quality of those jobs? It may be argued that many of the jobs created are poorly paid, part-time, casual or even part of the 'grey' economy. The second question is about the law and order problems which have been the by-product of this strategy. If most of the new night-time venues are based, at least in part, on the consumption of alcohol and aimed at the youth market, then rather than city centres becoming the civilised venues for café society, envisaged by the planners, they become barely regulated centres of disorder that are no-go areas to the older generations.

This project

This report presents a single case study of the G Casino in Luton. We used qualitative methods to collect data: focused interviews (individual and group) supplemented by non-participant observation and use of secondary documents (e.g. publicity material and CSR strategy). A case study method was chosen as it allows an exploration of complex practices in context. Qualitative methods also allow the exploration of subtle dilemmas and issues which may not be obvious from quantitative studies.

A total of 27 people were interviewed between September 2011 and February 2012. All the interviews were digitally recorded and fully transcribed afterwards. There were two broad categories of interviewee. The main group of interviewees were staff who worked in the G-Casino, Luton or for the Rank Group. A second group of interviewees were stakeholders who were connected in some way with the Casino or could provide an expert view on gambling regulation.

15 members of Casino staff were interviewed, 9 individually and 6 as part of a focus group. The interviews with staff explored their roles, their attitudes to their job, their attitudes towards the customers (and towards the management of problem gambling) and the way their work affected their life outside work. We talked to staff doing a range of jobs including dealers and inspectors and catering and reception staff. All interviews were conducted at the Casino during quiet times during the shift (either mid-morning or in the evening). In addition, we interviewed the General Manager, the work-based chaplain and two senior managers at Rank Head Office. On days that we were in the Casino to conduct interviews, we also conducted non-participant observation: this included busy nights as well as quiet periods.

8 stakeholders were interviewed. This included 1 national expert on gambling regulation and 7 people who were Luton locals and had a view on the Casino (including 2 representatives of charities which had received some funding from the Casino and 2 University students). In addition, we analysed published reports on local policy in Luton.

The interview data was analysed, with the help of the specialist software NVivo, into themes exploring patterns in an inductive way.

It was agreed with Rank that the Casino on which this case was based should be identified. However, we promised anonymity to our interviewees and thus have not provided more detailed data about role, age and length of service as this would enable identification of particular individuals. Similarly, when quoting from interviews we have only identified the category of person making the comment.

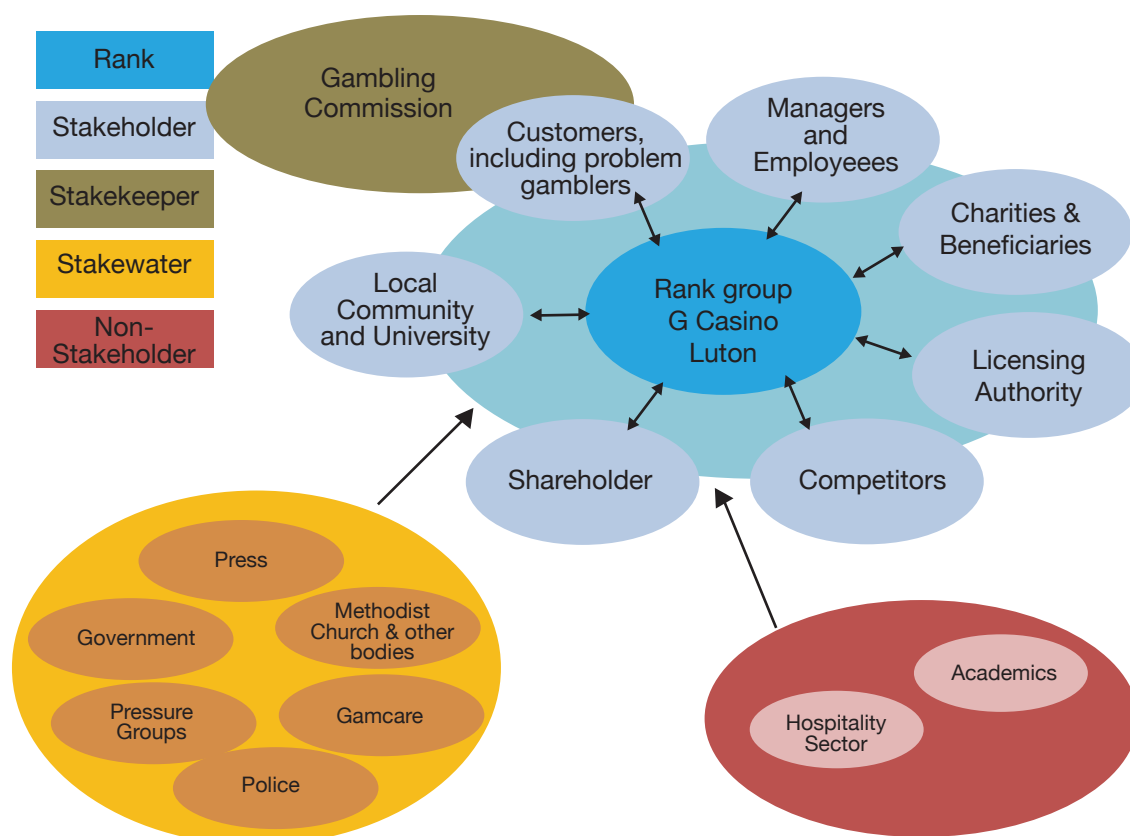
Stakeholder Mapping

We have used a model for stakeholder analysis developed by Fassin (2009) to assess the way a range of stakeholders are affected by the G Casino in Luton. In 'The Stakeholder Model Refined' Fassin considers that stakeholder management has become an important tool to transfer ethics to management practice and strategy. In his analysis of the stakeholder model he explores and justifies a graphical representation framework for stakeholder identification and categorisation which make distinction between stakeholders, stakewatchers, and stakekeepers. Fassin (2009) describes the four groups as follows:

- **Stakeholders** – a real stake, 'a loyal stake in the firm'
- **Stakewatchers** – 'protect the interests of real stakeholders'
- **Stakekeepers** – 'control and signals as a gatekeeper does'
- **Non-stakeholders** – do not have a direct impact on the business process

Figure 1 outlines the key stakeholders for the G-Casino Luton and it is through this map that we will explore the perceptions and attitudes linked its social impacts.

Figure 1 – Stakeholder Map for the G-Casino, Luton



Based on Fassin (2009)

We will start by providing some basic information about the G Casino in Luton and about the context in Luton. We will then discuss our results under three main headings:

- The management of staff and staff attitudes
- Rank's Corporate Social Responsibility Policies and Practices
- The Casino within the context of Luton

The G Casino Luton

G Casino is an example of a Casino which markets itself as a general entertainment venue. It is situated in a converted former furniture store building at the edge of the centre of Luton. One enters first through a reception area where all customers need to identify themselves and sign in to become member, if it is their first visit, or swipe their card at a gate if they are already members. Once inside one enters a large artificially-lit space with no windows and no clocks. The space is zoned into various areas. Near the entrance there are electronic gaming machines, the bar area, and a sports lounge area with large plasma screens. There is also a restaurant area and down some steps there are roulette and black jack tables. At the back, in a separate space, is the poker room. There were two cash machines. Staff uniforms are relatively casual (polo shirts). Dress codes for customers are also quite relaxed, but with some restrictions such as no sportswear or ripped jeans.

The Casino employs about 140 staff and can take up to about 900 customers at a time which makes it the biggest entertainment venue in Luton. There will be live music or events like a 'talent show' especially at weekends. There are also special packages available for groups such as office parties which may also include 'hosting sessions' to teach those new to Casinos how to play roulette and blackjack.

The management of staff and staff attitudes

Labour markets and opportunities for career development

One of arguments in favour of encouraging the development of the leisure sector is that this creates jobs. The leisure sector tends to be labour intensive but beyond this, it tends to provide 'convenient' employment; work which often requires little in terms of formal skills and which often provides the opportunity to work flexible hours and on a temporary basis. Thus it not only provides work but work which is accessible to more disadvantaged groups in the labour market: those searching for a first job; those looking for life-style work (temporary work for students or for those travelling around the world); and those looking for a 'port in the storm' who have been affected by the decline in other sectors of the economy or migrated from another country (Ram et al. 2001; Szivas et al. 2003).

But leisure sector work is also criticised for the quality of work that it provides. Firstly, because leisure organizations are labour intensive but they do not require many employees with high levels of formal skills, it may be argued that managers are motivated to reduce the cost of labour and have little incentive to invest in training and career development (Riley, 1991). Secondly, although most work in the leisure sector does not require formally recognised skills, it does require 'tacit' skill. Any customer service work requires the employee to know how to present him or herself and to be able to deal with people. Such skills have been termed 'aesthetic labour' (Nickson et al, 2005) and it has been argued that local job-seekers often lose out to students and migrants because they do not understand how to 'look right' and 'sound right' and project the right image for the organization.

This research is qualitative and thus did not aim to provide statistical evidence about the number and types of jobs that were created. However, the research did provide some insights into the routes into casino work and the opportunities for career development.

The Casino offers a range of jobs: those specialising in gambling (dealers and inspectors) but also more general hospitality roles (receptionist, waiter, bar work, security work etc.).

Rank reinforced their commitment towards being an equal opportunity employers especially with the employment of women. They pride themselves in offering work opportunities and promotions to school leavers with no real qualifications as long as they can do the job. Interestingly, in the employment of senior staff including General Managers, they are now employing people from outside mainstream gambling to people with more of a leisure background mirroring the diversification of the casino product as a 'leisure destination'.

Managers emphasised how they aimed to recruit locally, but would resist local authority requirements to just recruit locally (as had recently been required for the new Aspers Casino at Westfield Stratford City).

"You want experience as well and that was part of their (i.e. Aspers') problem is by recruiting locally they had to train everyone up from scratch so the whole place is run by trainees, if you like, which isn't... in time it will be fine but to start with is a bit worrying."

Experienced dealers were required:

"because they will be immediately clued up to being able to keep an eye out for problem gamblers etc. but also crime and cheats and things like that so... and the others will then come up and join them."

Dealers, unlike general hospitality staff, did require special training, but this did not mean that these jobs were only open to those who had academic qualifications. One of the managers explained:

"We get people with degrees coming through to join us, we get people that are, you know, literally quite poorly educated. However, even poorly educated people you find have very different skillsets, for instance, somebody who is not particularly doing good at arithmetic on paper can do fabulous things in their head, and it's that type of person who quite often is very manually dexterous and mentally dexterous, and that's the type of person that is perfect for us."

This is because dealers are trained to make calculations in a very different way from the way arithmetic is taught in schools. Another manager explained:

"I mean I always used to look at roulette dealers when I first started thinking, God, they must be brilliant, but they're ... [not] because it's done with pictures in their own minds. They're not adding up 25:1 times 19 to... no, they just know by seeing the pictures and it works. So you can become... you can go a long way with the attitude not the qualification. Once you're in and you're a dealer no-one ever says, how many O levels have you got and I'll decide whether I'm going to promote you to an inspector or to a manager based on that."

Although a policy of just recruiting locally, as happens in some new casinos, is seen as problematic, clearly employing people locally has its advantages particularly in managing shift over the 24 trading period.

Many of the gaming staff we spoke to described how they had originally entered this line of work because it was 'convenient' work (in the terms described by Szivas et al 2003, above). One spoke of coming out of University into an economy with high unemployment. He had decided to spend a couple of years travelling, by working on cruise ships:

"I did it for two years; went on the ships, and worked on the cruise ships for five years. And that's a fantastic lifestyle, really nice."

Another spoke of combining work in a casino with his university studies. Some of the female respondents talked of being attracted to work which they could combine with family responsibilities.

Whilst staff might have joined the Casino because it was 'convenient' work, it can hardly be described as a 'passing through' occupation in that there was little evidence that people moved on to other lines of work. Once people join a casino they tend to stay, according to this exchange from staff in a focus group interview:

- Respondent 1** Generally speaking, everyone that comes into the casino stays.
- Respondent 2** Yes.
- Respondent 3** Some may go for a year or two or three years, but they always come back.
- Respondent 4** The only people who left probably is security people.
- Respondent 5** Like she said, they all convert. I've been here 11 years, and...
- Respondent 1** When people leave, they go to another casino, you know?
- Respondent 2** Maybe they want more day shift jobs, they don't intend to work night shifts.

Sallaz (2002) comments that Casino work in the States became feminized as dealers were de-skilled with the advent of electronic surveillance and mechanised aids, such as shuffling machines. As white men fled the profession, he argues, 'management increasingly hired women and minorities'. The staff we saw and spoke to at G Casino came from a wide spread of ethnic backgrounds and there was a fairly even split between male and female and also a wide range of age groups. There was no evidence of the 'body fascism' that Jones and Chandler (2007) noted in Las Vegas casinos. Staff varied in age, appearance and weight. Indeed, there was some evidence that the Casino did offer good opportunities for progression for women, for those with no qualifications, and for older people, if they were prepared to work their way up. One female manager, who had entered the occupation almost by accident, having attended an interview in support of her sister, explained:

"I've been a manager now for about eight, nine years now. But I was quite old coming into the business, in relative terms, not so much as nowadays, but then they could have an ad that said 18 to 30 year olds and I was on the... 30, I was on the cusp of 30. I'm a grandmother now. I've had three... four children that have come through the casino, as well, on a social thing for us, you know."

She commented that her particular role had been traditionally done by men but, as her case showed, it was now possible for women to break in.

Attitudes to Casino work

The following quote summarises the elements that most staff appreciated about working in the casino:

"The best thing is, first of all, its reasonable pay, so, and the managers and all are very good with staff. If you ever have any problem, it's like you don't feel intimidated to go and say. They are here actually to help you, and it's a fun environment as well, so it's not... well, compared to an office work, a job, so it's obviously very different, and I like it. I've been here for ten years, so it must be enjoyable and good."

We were interested to explore whether staff felt there was any stigma attached to working in a Casino. Certain hospitality work has been described as 'dirty work' (Hughes, 1971) in the sense of being work which others in society stigmatise or look down upon. Casino work might have an additional taint given that some groups in society disapprove of gambling. While most staff felt that this presented no problems, staff with connections to communities that condemned gambling were faced with some contradictory pressures as the following two quotes indicate:

"I take pride in what I do and I think my friends and family are proud of what I do. So there's never been any issue with me... I have family that are Jehovah's Witnesses and obviously they're very anti casinos but they're proud of me doing the best that I can. That's what I like to do. I like to do the best that I can in whatever situation you put me in. If you were to put this in religion, obviously I'm working for the devil right now, you know. But I'm doing a good job for him!"

"Well, my family's quite liberal-minded and they don't have a problem with me working here. But the community gives me a hard time; the community gives me a hard time. They think I'm a bad person....So I don't take... I do what I think, my conscience is clear, I do what I think is good for me".

Technical skills and people skills

All customer service jobs require two sets of skills: technical skills and the “people” skills required to interact effectively with customers. When we talked to G Casino staff about what they needed to be able to do to be effective in their jobs, it was the customer service skills that were emphasised. For example, one staff member said:

“...We need to be customer obsessed ...If you have a need then you would want that need to be pre-empted, you don't want to have to ask.”

It was significant that the dealers talked about the importance of good customer service skills more than they talked about the demands of the technical skills required for dealing. Other studies of dealers have argued that, even though customer service is becoming more important, dealing is essentially about the handling of things rather than about the management of people (Austrin and West, 2005; Sallaz, 2002). Clearly, dealing needs to be done absolutely correctly, but the dealers we spoke to were less concerned about that aspect of their role because, once they were experienced, it became automatic. As one interviewee explained to us, it took considerable time to reach this stage:

“On average, it's a couple of years within the industry to be competent at the... Because when you're first, when you're first dealing on the tables, on the gaming tables, because you're... the technical side of it is so complex, your customer service is out the window. You're too busy focusing on what you have to do, etc. But after a couple of years you can balance, you can engage in conversation and also do what you have to do. So, it's a good couple of years before you can juggle the two things. But that's a very approximate average.”

While dealers are learning their craft, it is the role of the inspector to ensure they are working on tables that are not too demanding.

This particular G Casino also seemed to encourage staff to develop friendly and relaxed relationships with customers: staff who had worked in other casinos remarked on this. For example, one interviewee said:

“This is the...as far as, like, staff, customers wise, this is the friendliest casino I've worked at.... here, there's a lot more...there's a lot more banter, a lot more fun between staff and customers.”

One of the distinctive features of working in a casino rather than in other parts of the leisure industry is that the nature of the ‘product’ is so intangible. Essentially, the casino is offering an experience. One respondent summed it up:

“It is a service industry, the same as anything else. The only problem with this industry is what do you get for your money, you know. You come and you... it's about the thrill and the excitement really. I mean, it's no different than spending your money, in one sense, going on a roller coaster. You get the thrill from the roller coaster don't you, but you pay something and you get something back, it's that thrill. This is what the gambling's about, it is about that. And it's not about whether you've got thousands or whether you've got a couple of quid in your pocket. Everybody should be the same; they should get the same kind of thrill out of it.”

Thus the task of the dealer is to manage the experience so that customers have had a good time and are happy whether they have won or they have lost. The skills involved in ensuring this are complex because the dealer may be working with same customer over an extended period of several hours and having to judge their changing moods and needs. They also have to manage people with different needs at the same table. A respondent explained:

“a customer who is particularly difficult, based on their circumstances, for instance you've mentioned if they're losing a lot of money, yes, and they can become quite frustrated, and if a member of staff is entertaining a table, you know, everyone's having a raucous time and really enjoying it, and then poor old Fred Bloggs in the corner there is sort of not having the best of times, then of course as a member of staff you have to gauge that and you have to understand that. You know, it's being aware of your environment, and I think that's what we try to achieve, sort of, game awareness and customer awareness, so you know all that's going on around you, and then you make sure that you tailor your behaviour to that environment, and to that particular situation”.

There has been considerable research on customer service work which indicates that, although staff often take great pride in their ability to manage and please customers, it can also be stressful to keep smiling in the face of difficult and sometimes abusive customers. Hochschild (1983) used the term ‘emotional labour’ to emphasise the way that customer service staff are essentially paid to manage their own emotions for the benefit of the customer and to explore some of the negative consequences of this. In virtually all customer service roles, staff learn that a certain amount of abuse from customers ‘goes with the job’ and they have to learn to cope with it (Guerrier and Adib, 2000; Adib and Guerrier, 2001). G Casino was no different. One respondent commented:

“The nearest person to blame are the staff. And that is the most taxing. Obviously the amount of time I have spent in casinos you grow a thick skin to it. It's part of your job to take the blame, I suppose”.

However, one of the factors which seemed to help staff to cope with the difficult situations they inevitably faced was the supportive work culture in this casino. Staff looked out for each other but also felt that they would be backed up by managers if they took a tough line with abusive customers. This is an example of 'good practice'. While occasional bad behaviour by customers may be universal, it is not the case in other similar environments that staff always feel they have the support of managers if they resist (Guerrier and Adib, 2000; Folgerø and Fjeldstad, 1995). For example, at G Casino swearing at staff members is not accepted:

"We do have a policy where if someone's actually swearing at a dealer, we will say, excuse me, please don't swear at the dealer. If they did it again we may even stop them from gambling; and if it got as bad as that, where they continued, they'll probably get barred from here, because the GM doesn't have anything like that."

We had corroboration that this did actually happen both from an interview with a young customer whose friend had been banned for swearing and also from observation of an incident where a dealer was quickly supported by colleagues when she was struggling to deal with some slightly unruly clients on her table.

One of the contributing factors to bad customer behaviour is alcohol consumption. It would not make good business sense to tolerate drunkenness in a venue which sells itself on being safe and well-run, regardless of any risk to the license. Thus staff are trained to and do intervene although some commented that it could be difficult in practice to manage this effectively on a busy Friday or Saturday night and some commented they found working these nights quite stressful.

There is a converse problem with customer service staff: that rather than being abused by customers, staff find ways of manipulating customers to meet their own needs. Certain tipping cultures can encourage staff to find ways of eliciting tips and ways of rewarding the good tippers and punish non-tippers. This becomes a particular issue within a casino environment if staff are effectively motivated to encourage customers to gamble more heavily as certain American studies (notably Sallaz, 2002) have identified. The operator was aware of this as a potential problem when deciding on tipping policy when tipping in casinos was legalised in the UK and so all tips were pooled. Staff did not feel that the introduction of tipping had changed their attitudes to customers beyond encouraging a few dealers who did not really like customers to be a bit more pleasant.

Everybody watches everybody

One of the characteristics of casinos is the level of surveillance. In the words of Robert de Niro's character in Martin Scorsese's film 'Casino', 'everybody watches everybody'. Surveillance is built into structure of the roles as one of the gaming inspectors explained:

"I watch the dealers. The pit boss watches me. The cameras watch everybody. The managers are watching. Everyone's watching everybody else. It's a security-minded industry, because there's huge amounts of money involved at the end of the day, as it should be."

This degree of surveillance is required not least to meet licensing requirements, but it is worth remembering that, even compared with other work environments where employees are checked up on (for example call-centres), staff in casinos are particularly closely monitored. So we were interested to explore what they thought about being watched all the time. In general the surveillance was seen as a tool which was there to protect them as much as the casino and not as oppressive. For example:

"You do get people that do cheat, well, that's where that kicks in and, you know, it's a two way thing: it's there for your security and it's also there for the company's security. Mainly, I'm happy it's there because – especially with the microphones as well – any issues that arise, we have evidence there and then, and 99% of the time the company is going to back you up."

Other studies on employees in casinos, (for example Austrin and West, 2005) have drawn similar conclusions.

The surveillance is not just about picking up cheating. There is a licensing requirement for staff to identify behaviours associated with problem gambling and to intervene. There is a well-developed training package for G Casinos and all the staff we talked to had done the training and were well aware of what was expected of them. Some of the staff felt that the friendly atmosphere in the Casino made it easier for them to notice when someone was developing a problem and to know how to talk to them about dealing with it. It also meant they were motivated to intervene not just because they were required to but also because they cared about the person, as these two quotes indicate:

"There are customers that... like I said, it's a family atmosphere, not just with the staff, it's a family with the customers as well. You get to know individual customers really well and it helps with the problem gambling. You know, I don't know if you have family, but if your child has a problem you know without them speaking, you know from their actions. So do we. So do we with certain customers. So we can pick it... we can identify what that problem is early on because we have noticed a few things. And obviously we communicate with each other as well."

"In this business, especially in this casino, when we can have a relationship with the customer, we... even though we work here, and we should take care of our business, because it's our wages as well, we do still say, oh, don't spend that much, so we do actually, from behind our minds, we do say, oh, just be careful. Don't go over the line, etc, which is as well good for the customer, and our gamblers because obviously we try to control them, not because we have to, but because we want to"

Problem gambling was a topic which provoked some interesting views from a number of participants. Whilst the views expressed above were typical, i.e. that staff wanted to be responsible and did intervene or alert their manager as appropriate if they noticed something, staff were also concerned that finally there was a limit to what they could do. Even if someone was barred from all the local casinos, there were plenty of other ways that they could gamble away their money if that was what they wanted to do. Compared with internet gambling, at least in a casino, "we see the people, and at least we can go and have a word with them".

24/7 working and the effects on work-life balance

The 2005 legislation permitted casinos to remain open 24 hours in a day. The G Casino in Luton had taken advantage of this change of legislation to remain open all the time. Not all the Casinos in the chain did this: the manager had discretion to decide whether to stay open. For managers the main argument in favour of 24 hour opening was that it gave flexibility. It was no longer necessary to 'kick customers out' when they wanted to stay a little longer and it avoided queues outside of people waiting for opening time.

"Even if it's just those few customers who stay for that extra hour may just, sort of, pave the way for the morning or whatever it might be as opposed to chucking them out or those who come in at 11 rather than 12. People are now coming in to lunch because they know they can come in at lunchtime and not have to queue up outside, as I say. It's there for that reason and it's something we've had to do when we've sold it as licence applications."

24 hour opening also allowed the Casino to cater for customers who might be working shifts themselves and would be unable to access its facilities at more normal times.

Nonetheless, the Casino was very quiet in the mornings when we were often there conducting interviews. Ironically, the 7am to 3 pm shift (the most 'normal' shift in relation to most people's work hours) was popularly known as the 'graveyard shift' because it was so quiet. It seemed to be a shift that some staff loved and others hated and there were some staff who exclusively worked those hours.

"The graveyard shift is the finest shift on the planet, 7:00 am till three in the afternoon. Basically you finish at three and you've got the rest of the day to yourself. I love it, but not everybody likes getting up at three, four, five in the morning, so for me, it's ideal, but it's not everybody's cup of tea."

The effects of the move towards 24 hour opening were much debated by staff. Some staff expressed frustration in the lack consultation when the move was introduced. Others felt that the change had been positive as it had regularised shifts and allowed those who wanted to move to the 'more regular' graveyard shifts.

"The hours, a simple thing as the hours because... and it's even worse now that we're... it probably is a little bit better now that we're 24/7 and that might... and yet some people would say it's worse because we're open 24/7, but it's not. At least now we have very much more structured kind of rotas; like there's a lot of them that basically do graveyards, which is that... constantly graveyard, whereas before, with the old system, you could be on an... what we call an afternoon shift or a night shift, so you were never..."

Others felt strongly that the change had had a detrimental effect on their well-being:

"Oh, it gets a lot harder as you get older, you know. I've got two children, you know, it's a lot more difficult now because, you know, when you used to finish at four at least I could be up, I could be up by twelve/one o' clock. Now I finish at seven it gets later and..."

Once again, not everyone felt that shift work had a negative effect on family life. Others saw it as a useful way of combining child care responsibilities and work (particularly for those working part-time). For example:

"From my point of view, I had two kids and worked two, three nights a week, and I never missed a moment with my children, because... I was always there when they were, but I was only at work when they were asleep, so...for me, it was perfect."

For certain young people as well, who did not see themselves as 'morning people' night shifts were also seen as desirable.

"I think this job suits me as well because before I started here I was quite... not a morning person at all, and I used to stay up really late and this job absolutely suits me fine. You work through the night, it doesn't faze me one bit. The only thing I don't like about this job is you lose track of days because you're working from one day to the next, and then you just kind of forget which day you're on."

It is not surprising to note that the casino workers we spoke to represented themselves as belonging to, what sociologists have defined as, an 'occupational community' (Blauner, 1964, Salaman, 1971). Because the nature of their work made it more difficult for them sustain friendships and relationships with those doing different types of work, work becomes central to the lives of those in an occupational community and their friends at work became the people they socialised with outside. Occupational communities also tend to develop when people are doing work which has a contested status in wider society which also encourages those in the same line of work to band together with others who share their view of the world. Some staff explained how difficult it was to keep in touch with friends doing different types of jobs:

"I know I can frustrate a lot of my friends, because I'm not always necessarily available at the same sort of times as they are. They work a lot of nine to five's, a lot of very regular hour jobs, and they're, sort of, right, it's Saturday. We're all going out, and I'm like, well, that's just not an option for me. You know, if I needed to go out on a Friday or a Saturday or something like that, I would maybe need to book it a month in advance."

Thus staff tend to socialise with each other:

"You know that your Friday and Saturdays are pretty much dead, so you socialise throughout the week, pretty much with all the people that you work with, so...that's pretty much how it works. It's worked like that, I'd say, at every casino I've worked at. Your Saturdays are dead, you socialise predominantly with the staff that you work with, that's just how it really is."

Some felt that 24 hour opening had made this more difficult as not all staff were now finishing work at the same time.

"The staff are very friendly, and it's quite close, the business; but it's not as close now because as the 24 hour impact has come in now, the staff don't seem to mix and go out as much now because of... well, they're kind of like basically rubbing backs with each other."

Finally, a reason why some staff struggled with 24 hour opening was that they felt that it made it harder for them to manage problem gamblers.

"What normal person stays up after four o'clock in the morning? Four o'clock in the morning was fine, you know.... I like the casino as much as anyone else, you know, and we all play and we... but once you get to three, four o'clock in the morning, sorry, you've had enough to drink, you've had a gamble, you've had some food, go home, you know, please, you know."

Casino culture

Overall, there was a positive and supportive atmosphere amongst staff in the casino and considerable admiration and respect for the GM and management team. Other research has indicated that where managers allow staff to develop their own personalities and styles to the job and develop their own ways of dealing with customers, staff are more likely to retain a positive and committed attitude to their jobs (Sosteric, 1996; Seymour and Sandiford, 2005). We would argue that this was one reason for the positive work culture that had developed at G Casinos. Managers also tended to have worked their way up through operative roles and so they brought with them considerable skills and experience about how to manage situations and what staff might be facing.

This did not, of course, mean that all staff were equally satisfied. Many of the issues that arose were not with the nature of the work itself but with the demands of working in a 24 hour, 7 day a week operation and the impact this had not just on staff's working lives but also on their lives outside work. Work in the leisure sector is sometimes described as 'passing through' work; i.e. work that is taken up because it is convenient but people move on to something else once they have the opportunity. By contrast, casino work could be described as 'stuck in' work: even if someone had originally moved into this sector because it was convenient once there they tended not to move out. This was fine for those who had been able to develop good careers or those who continued to enjoy what they were doing and perhaps had been able to adapt their working patterns to fit changing life-styles (e.g. by doing more day shifts). But there were inevitably some staff who felt they were 'stuck' in the negative sense.

The Rank Group's social responsibility policies and practices

Rank's 'operating responsibly' commitments

In their Annual Report and Financial Statements 2010 The Rank Group make a commitment to operating responsibly:

"At Rank we aim to operate in a fashion that is considerate towards our people, our customers, our communities and the natural environment. Our performance in these areas is critical to customer trust in our brands and broader society's faith in our integrity and legitimacy."

Rank offers pledges to various key stakeholder groups. In relation to their 'people' they pledge to provide 'fair, safe, respectful and rewarding employment for people who share our commitment to making our customers feel valued'. In relation to their customers, they pledge 'enjoyment to our customers through leisure experiences that are fun, social and safe'. In their 'communities' pledge they 'will attempt to make a positive difference to the lives of people in the locations that we operate through local engagement, community involvement and economic contribution'.

These commitments are in line with established views of the purpose of corporate social responsibility. Wood (1991), for example, outlined an integrated framework for three principles of corporate social responsibility. Firstly he identifies 'legitimacy' as the first institutional principle, whereby society grants legitimacy and power to business. If that power is subsequently abused, society can then deny that power. The second principle is of 'public responsibility', that businesses are responsible for the outcomes of their action. The third principle is that of 'managerial discretion', those managers are moral actors with an obligation to exercise that discretion. Our research shows evidence of Rank's active participation in all three of these areas through for example their commitments to their Responsible Gambling Policy.

The commitment towards 'integrity' reflects a growing trend within companies to consider how to manage the organisation's integrity, an issue raised by Lyn Sharp Paine from Harvard University in 1994. In 'Managing for Organizational Integrity' she outlined several features that are common to successful company 'integrity' strategies. These features include: clearly communicated guiding values and commitments that make sense; that company leaders are personally committed, credible and willing to take action on the values that they espouse; that the espoused values are integrated into the normal channels of the management decision-making and activities; that the company's systems and structures support and reinforce its values; and finally that managers throughout the company have the decision-making skills, knowledge and competencies needed to make ethically sound decisions. Rank senior managers repeatedly reinforced their commitments towards caring for and managing their customers:

"In this business, especially in this casino, when we can have a relationship with the customer, we...even though we work here, and we should take care of our business, because it's our wages as well, we do still say, oh, don't spend that much, so we do actually, from behind our minds, we do say, oh, just be careful. Don't go over the line, etc., which is as well good for the customer, and our gamblers because obviously we try to control them, not because we have to, but because we want to."

Sharp Paine (1994) makes a distinction between 'compliance' and 'integrity' strategies in terms of their characteristics and in the way that they are implemented. A compliance strategy is characterised by conformity with externally imposed standards, to prevent criminal misconduct and is largely lawyer driven, implemented through auditing, penalties, reduced discretion and education is through compliance standards. An integrity strategy is different in that it is characterised by an ethos of self-governance according to chosen standards with the objective of enabling responsible conduct which is management driven and implemented through company values and aspirations, education, leadership and accountability. In operating a gambling business, Rank has the task of having to manage the rigid compliance regulations imposed on them yet also to demonstrate a care and integrity in the way the business is run and this is reinforced through their Responsible Gambling Policy which is listed below:

- Clear customer communication to promote responsible play and to provide advice for those concerned about problem gaming.
- Employee training to support teams in identifying at risk customers and intervening to provide support. . .
- Requirement for customer facing employees to undergo a responsible gaming assessment two year after qualifying from training.
- Proof of age requirements in our club venues (and age verification procedures online) to prevent under-age gambling.

(The Rank Group Director's Report Extract 2010)

In 2001 Rank decided to improve their management of responsible gambling procedures as was explained by senior managers:

“ . . . [we] changed the way that we did responsible gambling in our premises, not just the casinos but also the bingo clubs. It had always been that we were aware of problem gambling. We didn't want it. We didn't condone it and we did what we could to help people as every operator did. But the way that was done was invariably, you know, a notice that says, do you have a problem, call this number, and if people ask to be excluded yes of course we would do so”.

Between 2002 and 2007 they undertook extensive research into developing innovative approaches to responsible gambling as opposed to the 'reactionary' approaches of the past. They developed much more 'proactive' approaches of being more up-front and open with customers about the dangers of gambling, and in particular encouraging people to take control themselves and ultimately be responsible by educating them to set their own limits, and making them aware that they may indeed have a gambling problem.

“So the way we've focused our policy and increasingly done so is to very much be preventative and identify people as early as possible, make them aware of the issues and, as I said, make that positive... a way of doing it and so the way we did it then by, you know, producing the literature as you will have seen there but we've now moved forward by having our own dedicated website, which I think was certainly unique in the land based market, which is stayincontrol.rank.com.”

Rank work with support organisations such as Gamcare to develop literature, materials and practices. Interestingly, because customers want to remain discreet many of the advice leaflets are taken from the toilet areas within the casino so the company now has a policy of providing the leaflets in those areas. The website supports the printed literature as well.

Rank therefore have clearly defined policies and procedures in the management of the responsible gaming. They have extensive training for staff in terms of recognising problem gamblers and they provide customers with an extensive range of brochures, literature and website information to keep customers informed and educated about the risks of gambling. Rank's has developed the 'Stay in Control' website <http://stayincontrol.rank.com/> which is their designated site to help customers gamble responsibly. They also offer help by training staff; allowing customers to set limits on how much money they can draw from the cash desk; allowing customers to 'self-exclude' and identify their own gambling habits; and provide leaflets in the casino and in local charities offices offering practical help to stay in control. There is an emphasis here that the customer also needs to take responsibility for their gambling as well as the casinos itself, and this can be implemented through the gambler's choice of self-exclusion. Rank regularly analyses data on self-exclusions as was explained by one of their senior executives:

“we've fed in the whole of the self-exclusions for 2008 and 2009 into a computer . . . then came up with a model which seemed to show unsurprisingly that people gradually spend more and more money and then they do drop off a cliff in its simplest form. But there were a lot of other things in terms of the profile if you set a type of person, the type of job or the type of amount of time they spend online. But one of the most fascinating things he's found is that the customers who set themselves limits rarely if ever went on to self-exclude . . .”

From our interviews with staff there was a high level of awareness of the issues of problem gambling, with a good understanding of the processes of dealing with customers. The main indicator of a potential problem with customers is changes in behaviour. There are clearly defined mechanisms for reporting these issues and staff seemed confident that there was strong managerial support with the process.

The company has made a huge investment in their computer-based training programme for every single customer-facing staff member. The training takes into account the complexity and delicacy of interacting with customers who may show signs of being a problem gambler through what they call 'intervention conversations' which diplomatically, on a one-to-one basis with customers away from the gaming area talk about what may be bothering them. Often this may lead to advising on self-exclusion or offering a 'development plan'.

The all-important 'signs' can be changes in playing styles, hanging around the in-house ATM machines at midnight so that they can get the next day's allowance. This is all managed through visibly monitoring, policing and observing which can be done easily in this type of land-based operation especially those customers in attendance over extended hours. Managers are there to help customers but Rank stress that they are not trained counsellors, but the key issue is to get people to recognise that they may have a problem and that they should seek advice from professionals such as Gamcare. Rank does not consider that setting fixed limits works because of the subjective nature of the value of the bets. Also they do not understand the basis on which regulation arbitrarily restricts the number of gaming machines to just 20.

Rank consider that there needs to be a balance struck between managing and supervising a safe environment for the gambling and developing 'entertainment', so allowing people to be unencumbered by old rules such as the ban on alcohol on gaming tables:

"So the controls in the casinos stop crime but if we have people who are coming in and making a lot of noise and drinking we don't want them and now we can bar them because of the registration. So we have the ability to keep out trouble makers but in terms of people who come in and drink a lot more it doesn't happen because we don't want them. Does it make people drink and gamble more? No, because whilst we allow drinking on the tables it's not wonderfully practical but it's nice that people have the flexibility to bring their pint onto the floor while before they had to stop."

One member of staff however described the challenging nature of managing alcohol on the gaming floor:

"... now, you can bring your alcohol to the gaming floor, to the table, and sometimes they are drinking quite heavily and gambling. We try and put a stop to it, but try putting a stop to close to 1,000 people on a Friday and Saturday night is virtually impossible, you know. So even though we try and do the right thing and say, excuse me, Sir, take a break, go away; and as soon as one leaves another one pops up."

There seems to be an emerging distinction between the issue of 'problem gamblers' and what the casino sees as 'problem customers'. Again the issue of customers and alcohol emerges as a major concern for the General Manager:

"as well as watching out for problem gambling people who are drunk we don't want them gambling because they're not in control of themselves and some will also then start getting lairy because they're losing and they've lost the reason as to they win or lose and then they end up getting barred."

Some staff expressed personal concerns about the younger customers:

"Casinos used to be a business where the age group were 45, 50s upwards, they've earned their money, this is a place where they felt special and go in and gamble and have a meal with their husband or wife. But, now, this is a regular normal for people to go to a casino on a Friday, Saturday night, and gamble. Is that a good thing, or a bad thing? Personally, I don't think it's a good thing, you know. I would like... I don't think the younger culture should go into gambling so deep, you know".

A local person identified an issue for her young son who visited the Casino at the age of 18:

"And on one particular experience there was a group of them went in there, and a girl about five years older than him came out with about enough to buy a car one night, and she'd never been in a casino before. And I wondered whether that would spark, yes, more interest out of him, which I think it probably did, to start off with. I think he's probably gambled more online after that than I knew, but it seems to have run its course with him".

The tight regulation of, for example, the quota of gaming machines is of particular frustration to Rank:

"... in the club the customers in a busy club like Luton, up to 1,000 people in a day, 20 machines. I've come all the way from Watford, Northampton or wherever, I want to play a machine, all these people are on them. Why haven't you got anymore machines? It's not our fault. Well get some more. I can't, it's the law. So we've put a notice up that says, don't blame us, sign this petition. We don't know what to do with the petition but it's been building up hundreds of signatures because people..."

we're using it to let them vent their spleen about the fact that that's now... that's a good example that limiting by law doesn't do the trick."

Business Imperatives

Discussions with senior managers at Rank showed they considered that the 2005 Gambling Act has had a dramatic effect on the way that they run and operate their casinos. It was interesting to note that it was the smoking ban of 2007 and the increase on duty that had a more short-term dramatic effect, and this coinciding with recession in 2009 has made trading a real challenge. They do maintain that the G Casino brand has remained strong. The Act has however offered them much more flexibility in the aspects such as 24 hour opening, more liberal membership restrictions and the lifting of the ban on advertising. Rank can now market to those looking for a leisure and entertainment destination for a 'night out experience' rather than just a 'gambling haunt'.

Rank talked about the 'prejudice' that casino operators experience, often fuelled by certain elements of the press, when introducing new casinos:

"we've had to battle still against the prejudice in that example where initially local residents were quite resistant because it was near to a school and they thought we'd be luring their children in."

"We've obviously had to work with them but since it's been built the reaction to it has been incredibly positive from local people. The headmaster of the school is the best friend, as it were, because he's... we've had students come in and learn about construction with the building company long before it was anything like a casino but just that which they've never had anyone who's been helpful enough to say, yes, your kids can come in and we'll show them how we go about building a new premises. So that is all helping and now the media campaign can start as it is in terms of going out and telling people about what we do, showing pictures of the venues."

Along with the duty of care the casino has towards the customers, one could argue that as a business, they have a duty to other key stakeholders especially shareholders to increase shareholder value. The business needs to market the facilities, products and services to legitimately generate sales and profits. The challenge for the business is to convert the first-timers (those particularly attracted in by 'entertainment' to become what Rank term 'life-long customers'. As the General Manager explains:

"we want them to become life-long customers, but we want them to become life-long customers using the whole facility. You know, gaming is the core of our facility without doubt, but because we have a multi-faceted leisure facility, you know, to me, somebody coming in and buying a pint of beer every Friday night is as valuable as somebody, you know, losing a few pounds on a gaming table. The difference is the same, we still make a profit on the pint of beer, so growing that type of customer, somebody that comes in and has a meal in the restaurant, you know, if they come in and have one meal in the restaurant we want their meal to be really good, the service to be really good, they go out and advocate the G Casino as being the best thing since sliced bread, and then we get more people on the back of that. But the most important thing is they return, and then they become a frequent customer."

The General Manager highlights the mix of business that the casino is now attracting, and considers that the gaming side of the business tends to fluctuate, but the 'entertainment' side of the business is generating growth.

"... the ancillary departments are starting to accelerate in terms of generating revenue, and we're finding that, you know, especially here, and I think it's the same in most of our clubs, the gaming part of our business fluctuates as it has always done so, but the ancillary areas, the revenue is coming up, so we're finding that the clientele we're attracting to this environment is one that is not necessarily just going out to game, they're going out for a more rounded evening experience within the night-time economy."

"... the casino environment is bringing people into the town centre that wouldn't necessarily come into the town centre because as all town centres have, there is a certain reputation about the night-time economy on certain days of the week".

The staff focus group discussed the success of the casino:

"... we are the busiest place in Luton, on a Friday and Saturday night by far. You know, we are eclipsing what everybody else is doing threefold. We're getting 900 people in the middle of the month, everyone else is lucky to get 300, so...I'm thinking, I think it stands as a good advertisement for what we're doing."

The General Manager also talked of maintaining the sustainability of the business:

"the focus is on making sure that the customer comes in and enjoys each visit, and then of course that would help to make them decide which casino they would be likely to use in the future and make them return, or encourage them to return."

The challenge is balancing the marketing and business imperatives, whilst demonstrating the duty of care through the responsible gambling policies and practices. Rank clearly takes both very seriously.

Charities

As part of Rank's commitment towards key stakeholders, the Group actively participates in engaging with charities and charitable giving. In 2010 the group contributed £288,000 to respite care with Marie Curie Cancer Care. More locally the casino also gives charitable contributions to organisations such as the Bedfordshire and Luton Community Foundation. The Foundation then distribute these funds

through to smaller local charities in the local area. The funds are considered welcome by the local charities we talked to although one charity considered that while the bidding and reporting process was not too onerous, there were concerns that the charity had no contact with the casino and their staff whatsoever. The sums that the charity was bidding for were too small and in terms of running a charity the income derived was 'unsustainable'. They felt that that they wanted to be able to speak to their funders and explain the work that they did and have much more of an active engagement with the funders.

In terms of local social support the General Manager actively participates in engaging in local community services such as the SOS bus which offers free late night bus services for those people on a night out, as well as being on the Safer Luton Group. The Casino has even provided a local church with CCTV facilities to help improve the safety of the church and for church goers. The casino has a good relationship with the local university especially in the Student Union. The Students Union has put on a number of 'fun' gambling social events (which does not include the betting of money) in conjunction with the Casino.

Rank sees its 'charity strategy' as fundamental to their CSR commitments. Generally the casinos fund charities directly so the funding of the Trust in Luton is unusual. They see that encouraging General Managers to motivate staff to get involved in fundraising and charitable giving as 'good practice' for the business as casino should be seen as part of the local community, as an employer, as a contributor to business success in the local area and that it makes 'good commercial sense'. They also commit to environmental campaigns through their internal website, with the aim of reducing their carbon footprint. They like to be seen as a 'good corporate citizen' "if the local community's thriving then as a business you're more likely to thrive. So, you know, I think it's, sort of, a win-win situation."

The Casino within the context of Luton

As a town, Luton has a mixed population of just over 194,000. 68.1% are White, 3% Mixed, 18.9% Asian/Asian British, 7.4% Black British, and 2.6% Chinese and other. The overall trends in population growth for Luton are relatively stable. Household income levels are falling in Luton in comparison to the UK average. Household income per head in Luton is now nearly 20% below the UK average. Luton is also ranked as the 69th (out of 326) most deprived local authority. Luton is becoming relatively more deprived in comparison with local authorities in the country.

(Luton Borough Council 2011a)

In this environment of relative deprivation, one can question why a casino operator would want to continue to invest in a casino in Luton. Historically Rank had a Grosvenor Casino in Luton for many years largely catering for the gambling community. The new casino was developed with larger, more flexible facilities that can cater for a more diverse market in Luton. Luton draws on a wide catchment area attracting custom over a wide area from Brighton to Norfolk. The fact that Luton's industrial base has suffered over the years did not appear to have been of a major concern as the nearest competition being Northampton.

In the 1960s Luton, and more specifically the Vauxhall car plant in Luton, was the site for a ground-breaking series of sociological studies, "the Affluent Worker Studies", which explored the way in which the attitudes and lives of the 'new' working class were changing (Goldthorpe et al 1968). It was resonant to be in Luton for this research and to be focused on the leisure sector as it exemplifies some of the changes in society in the last fifty years: notably the shift from an industrial to a post-industrial economy and the shift from an emphasis on production to that on consumption. One of our respondents especially represented this shift having moved from employment in a car factory to being a Casino employee.

Has there been a social impact in terms of crime or disorder of the move towards a leisure/night time economy in Luton? We had mixed responses from local residents who we interviewed. The following comment presents a negative view about Luton:

"... the town's in a terrible mess, the town is. A great deal of underage drinking, a great deal of pre-loading before people go out, a lot of violence."

But this conflicts with another interviewee who commented on her daughter's views of Luton:

"... she reckons Luton is one of the safest towns to be in that time of night."

However, all respondents saw the G Casino as a well-run venue that catered to all age groups and could be a pleasant place to go whether you wanted to gamble or not.

“the G Casino here is probably one of the most sophisticated casinos in town; it’s a little bit more grownup, it’s a nice clean environment, it’s well controlled, safe, has live music on and it’s got good bars, it’s got nice restaurants.”

“When I came to Luton the Casino was already there so for me I’d never been to one before. ...I like live entertainment; they have live entertainment at the weekends. As far as Luton as a town is concerned, there’s not too many nice safe venues to go, but you always get that out there that it’s run well, it’s a nice place to go for a drink.”

It is interesting to note the use of the term ‘safe’ to describe the Casino as in essence the entertainment that a casino provides is the thrill of taking a ‘risk’. Several commentators (Cosgrave, 2010; Giddens, 1991; Gephart, 2001; Lyng, 2005) have pointed out how in contemporary society, people are often looking for risk in their leisure activities: but that they are looking for “safe risk” or “cultivated risk”. In contrast to the other venues that were part of Luton’s night-time economy: the Casino was safe as it was seen as being well-run, because although alcohol was available its use was tightly controlled and because it was not just seen as being a venue for young people.

The notion that alcohol misuse rather than gambling was perceived by local people as a major problem is reinforced by a review of ‘Gambling Policy’ which was prepared for Luton Borough Council in 2009 by Cello MRUK. The research included a survey of 470 telephone interviews with local residents in Luton about licensed gambling premises in the town. The report revealed some interesting findings, namely that 72% of respondents indicated that they had visited licensed gambling premises and that 21% said they visited premises at least once a week. 42% said they have taken part in gaming or gambling activities at the licensed premises they had visited, but interestingly 69% of respondents felt alcohol premises which had gambling attracted the most problems in Luton (Cello MRUK 2009). The high level of participation in different forms of gambling is matched by a perception of the problems associated with premises with alcohol and gambling.

The social problems in Luton were discussed in the interviews with local stakeholders in Luton. The views were varied and offered a complex mix of perceptions. One charity worker considered:

“ . . . the biggest worry is people out of work, you know, and lack of opportunity. There’s a whole underclass growing up whose parents have never worked and it’s not perceived that they should.”

“I think high cost of mortgages, not being able to get on the housing ladder, being forced into rental accommodation that’s way too expensive or inadequate for families, one or the other. I think that the debt problems arising here are related to, I’m not going to come down on the side of any government, but all governments. There’s no houses being built here for years, where are they going to go, there are no sites in Luton, you can’t get a site outside Luton, because there’s somebody with a thing against it. What are they going to do, wait for a crisis? And this is where debt is a problem here. Because we could say, we see this coming in through the door every day, people get into trouble with debt.”

Reith (2007) addresses issues such as the risk factors and disadvantaged groups and that those on welfare and low levels of education and household income are most likely to suffer adverse consequences of increased gambling. She considers that the availability and convenience are strongly associated with problem gambling. Interestingly she considers casinos tend to require deliberate effort, in terms of planning and travelling to a venue, which discourages impulsive play.

Reith identifies a profile for typical casino customers:

“Casino patrons have higher levels of income and education than other gamblers, and while casinos are the most popular form of gambling for individuals from the higher social class, they are the least popular form for those from the lowest social class.”

Reith (2007:7)

Since the introduction of the Gambling Act 2005, the profile of customers has however changed dramatically. The introduction of ‘entertainment’ and 24 hour opening has provided Rank with both opportunities and challenges in terms of the way that they run their business especially in relation to managing a complex mix of customers. Their commitment towards managing key stakeholder needs thought ‘pledges’ are supported by a genuine care for customers, particularly in relation to the issue of ‘problem gambling’. The way in which the management implement their policies and procedures for managing their responsibility has been endorsed by both staff and the different stakeholder groups we interviewed. Managing problem ‘customers’ is as challenging as managing problem ‘gamblers’, but through strong leadership and rigorous procedures and mechanism the casino is able to maintain an ‘integrity and legitimacy’.

Conclusions and recommendations

This research project has reported on a case study exploration of the social impacts of a UK, local provincial casino on key stakeholder groups. The report has addressed the issues under three main headings:

- The management of staff and staff attitudes
- The Rank Group's social responsibility policies and practices
- The casino within the context of Luton

Some of the important issues to emerge from the research are as follows:

- Casino staff and managers offered their honest and open perceptions on a range of issues from the challenges of managing both the technical skills required for the job, as well as the customer service challenges of dealing with sometimes a difficult mix of customers as an entertainment venue. Most of the staff were highly skilled and very experienced in their work. They considered that the casino was well managed and offered high praise for the manager and the way that there was a highly supportive work culture and environment especially when taking a tough line on abusive customers.
- The question of the effects of 24 hour opening on staff elicited a mixed reaction. Some felt that it was positive in regularising shifts; others considered that it had a detrimental to their well-being; others, particularly the female respondents felt that it was useful for their child care responsibility; and some felt that it made it harder to manage problem gamblers. Managing the customer 'experience' was clearly the most testing and stressful aspects of their work. Most staff considered that surveillance, as a result of a highly regulated industry, was positive as a form of protection especially when dealing and managing customers. Rank senior management consider that 24 hour opening offers the casino much more flexibility in the types of products that they can offer customers.
- The Rank Group's social responsibility policies and practices were considered particularly in relation to their commitment towards 'integrity and legitimacy', and their pledges towards key stakeholder groups were discussed. The Group has clearly defined policies and procedures in the management of responsible gaming. The staff were given extensive training and had a high level of awareness in relation to recognising 'problem gamblers', and also customers are encouraged to address their own gambling habits through initiatives such as 'Stay in Control'. There was evidence of 'best practice' in terms of online training particularly for customer-facing staff. Staff saw the success of the casino not just in terms of being the leading leisure business in Luton, but also in terms of the strong and supportive leadership from the General Manager and his senior team. There was evidence from all the respondents interviewed that Rank were consistently adhering to their Responsible Gambling Policy in terms of communication, training, staff assessment and membership management, especially in terms of access to the casino.
- Rank consider that there needed to be a balance struck between managing and supervising a safe environment for the gambling and developing 'entertainment', both of which they managed highly effectively according to many different stakeholder groups interviewed. As a commercial business, the question of commitments towards business imperatives was addressed. Staff in particular saw the business as successful both as a venue as well as for the town. The question of key stakeholder groups such as charities was also considered here. Rank supports and funds many charities and local support services some in the local area in Luton. All respondents interviewed considered that the casino was a safe and pleasant venue. None considered that casino gambling had a major effect particularly on local needy stakeholder groups such as those with debt problems.
- In relation to the Casino in Luton, many of those interviewed had mixed views about Luton as a town. Some considered it to be in a 'terrible mess' especially in relation to alcohol consumption. Others saw it as a safe town, and in particular the Casino was considered to be a well-run venue and a pleasant place to go. All stakeholders, including local charities considered that the casino offered a safe environment for both leisure and gambling. The recurring issue of alcohol consumption emerged as one of the main problems for staff in their management of customers, particularly on busy weekend nights. Other stakeholders interviewed also considered that alcohol was one of the most challenging social problem in Luton, and this tallies with the Cello MRUK research findings that 69% of the 450 respondents interviewed felt alcohol premises which had gambling attracted the most problems in Luton (Cello MRUK 2009).
- The research raised a range of issues about the difficulty in identifying and managing 'problem gamblers'. The question of the problematic nature of the management of customers and the consumption of alcohol needs to be considered in more depth. The casino attracts young clientele, particularly at weekends, and we would recommend that further qualitative research be conducted about the effects of gambling on younger people, their perceptions and awareness of the nature of gambling and in particular 'best practice' in management of those in the age group 18-24.
- In terms of the future of casinos in the UK, Rank considers that it is very much down to the Government and whether they will give permission to extend the industry further. Rank would see further deregulation as positive so that they can develop their 'lovely' G Casino brand further. They have

been in existence for over 75 years “we’re not in for a quick buck”. They want to develop a good sustainable business. They see the advent of dramatic advances in technology through iPads and iPhones that will transform the industry but also recognise that they have to get ahead of it from a ‘responsible gambling’ point of view. Rank is highly proactive in terms of meeting requirements that are conditions of the licencing authority, but they are also leaders in the industry in terms implementing strategies for managing the issue of problem gamblers. Their rigorous approach to legal compliance is matched by a genuine care for their customers.

Proposals

- There are concerns about the participation of young people in casino gambling, even though they may be attracted to the casino for ‘entertainment’. More research needs to be undertaken to ensure that they are not vulnerable to addiction.
- The Rank Group should continue to question the definition and management of problem gambling beyond observing ‘changes in behaviour’.
- Opening a casino for 24 hours a day may be viable on a financial basis, but clearly there are concerns about the impact of: unsociable shifts; work/life balance; the social life of staff; and the normalising of gambling over extended periods.
- The Rank Group could consider more active involvement and communication with the local charities that they fund to understand what the challenges are for those charities.

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