Hospitality Management Competence

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	ABSTRACT
	The growth and changes facing the hotel industry globally have in several ways affected the competence of its personnel. There is growing concern about graduate competency and what industry requires. Previous studies reveal that hospitality management programs do not adequately prepare hospitality students with the competencies necessary to fit today's workplace. Therefore, educational institutions must play their role in developing and instilling important competencies in their graduates so as to prepare them for the competitive world of work. This paper aims to investigate the competencies required by hospitality graduates from an industry perspective. This paper is based on previous studies regarding hospitality management competencies by considering competencies from the management competency model and generic skills framework. The Delphi technique was used to investigate graduate competencies from the perspective of the hospitality industry.
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INTRODUCTION

Lefever and Witham (1998) describe competencies as knowledge, traits, skills and abilities that are associated with people who behave in certain ways that distinguish extraordinary from average performance. Competence is also referred to as a person's skills, knowledge and attitudes that can be observed, measured and produce results (Tsai et al., 2006). Competency can be viewed as applied knowledge, skills and attitudes that create competitive advantages for a company (Kouwenhoven, 2010). Spencer and Spencer, (1993) relate competence to individual characteristics that are related to work performance.

Concern for investigating the skills of hospitality graduates should be an ongoing effort as the needs of the hospitality industry change as technology develops (Raybould & Wilkins, 2005). There are several studies regarding graduate competencies seen from an industrial perspective. A study by Brownell

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and Chung, (2001); Kriegl (2000) and Tsai et al., (2006) suggest that hospitality graduates should have strong leadership skills and should practice flexibility when working in the industry. Tsai et al., (2006) in their research on graduate competencies conducted in Taiwan have identified interpersonal skills as the most important skills for hospitality graduates, followed by conceptual and leadership competencies. In Australia, the hospitality industry expects its graduates to have good interpersonal, problem-solving and self-management skills. (Raybould & Wilkins, 2005). While in Ireland, hotel manager choice graduates represent practical and soft human resource management skills that include technical competence, analytical, communication skills, having a good personality, customer service skills, problem solving; financial skills; accounting and budgeting (Connolly & McGing, 2006; Nolan, Conway, Farell & Monks, 2010).

A study conducted by Shariff and Abidin (2014) on human resource managers' perceptions of the competencies of tourism and hospitality graduates in Malaysia shows that the ability to work as a team is considered the most important competency compared to the least considered competency, namely the ability to use. technology. In another study conducted by Sisson and Adams (2013) on identifying important hospitality management competencies needed by managers in the hospitality industry, it was found that the industry prefers graduates with soft competencies, especially in developing positive customer relationships and the ability to work effectively with other subordinates (Hidayat, 2022). However, apart from emphasizing soft skills, graduates must also equip themselves with hard competencies obtained through education and training. However, apart from soft and hard competencies, Littlejohn and Watson (2004) raise other issues related to graduate attitudes. Therefore, the attitude of graduates in working in the industrial world is seen as an important aspect because of the knowledge that graduates gain during their studies. They revealed that graduates must have good human resource management skills and be more customer focused in order to be involved in the hotel industry. Therefore, they suggest the need for educational institutions to emphasize the development of generic management skills.

A review of previous literature regarding graduate competencies found that industrial graduates are expected to have certain competencies, attitudes and behavior. Therefore, universities that offer hospitality programs are expected to be able to introduce programs that encourage human resource management skills and offer courses that can develop soft skills including decision making, problem solving, teamwork, initiative and interpersonal skills as well as being able to introduce students to real industry. (O'Connor, 2002). At the same time,

other competencies including teamwork, basic knowledge of information technology, oral communication, presentation skills and time management can also be achieved at the college level (Malone, 2007).

The literature reveals that the study of competency is linked to the competency model. Competency models were developed to assist in competency studies. Mc Lagan (1996) describes the competency model as a decision tool that describes the main abilities to do a particular job. Several competency models have been developed in other countries to assist human resource development in identifying the competencies needed for the workforce, such as the Sandwith model, Generic Skills Framework and Employment and Training Administration (ETA). Previous research on hospitality competencies has adopted Sandwith's competency domain model (e.g. Hu, 2010; Kay and Russette, 2000; Tsai et al. 2006; Zopiatis, 2010). Hu (2010) conducted a study on the development of core competencies for innovative culinary development while Kay and Rusette (2000) also based on the Sandwith model to identify the competencies of hospitality managers. This model focuses on management competencies which outline five domains, namely leadership; interpersonal; conceptual-creative; administrative and technical domains (Sandwith, 1993). Another model in competency studies, the generic skills framework was developed by the Australian National Training Authority [ANTA], (2003). The model outlines nine skill areas including communication; team work; problem solving; initiative and enterprise; planning and organizing; self management; learning and personal attributes (ANTA, 2003). Raybould and Wilkins (2005), in their study of hospitality managers' expectations of graduate competencies in Australia have adopted a general skills framework because this model provides an alternative to previous competency models that are more specific to management. In line with this, Raybould and Wilkins, (2005; 2006) in their research describe the generic skills framework as employability skills or soft skills that are important for getting a job in an organization. Apart from using competency models to identify and develop industrial workforce competencies, previous research also found the use of competency-based educational approaches in curriculum development (Brownell & Chung, 2001). This competency-based education has been accepted in technical and vocational education.

The foundation of this research is based on previous literature regarding hospitality management competencies by considering the management competency model and general skills framework. Although previous literature has identified several competencies that are considered important for hospitality graduates in other countries, this research attempts to investigate the

competencies of local hospitality graduates from the perspective of the Malaysian hospitality industry.

RESEARCH METHODE

This research uses the Delphi technique to investigate the competencies required of hospitality graduates from the perspective of the hospitality industry. The Delphi technique is an organization of group communication that emphasizes complex issues and requires repetition to obtain consensus regarding several future directions (Loo, 2002). The Delphi technique can sometimes be conducted in three rounds of research before consensus is reached (Duffield, 1993). The Delphi technique was chosen for this research because this technique is known for collecting judgments and opinions from a group of experts (Kaynak, Bloom & Leibold, 1994; Kotler & Keller, 2012). In this research the Delphi technique will involve several steps. The first step is to identify problems related to studies from previous literature (Kaynak et al., 1994). Then proceed with developing and designing the questionnaire. The second step involves identifying and selecting panelists. The third step involves distributing the questionnaire for the first round of Delphi and questionnaire responses, evaluation and analysis for the first round. The fourth step involves distributing the questionnaire for the second round of Delphi and questionnaire responses, evaluation and analysis for the second round. If consensus is reached, the next step is to proceed with the final report. However, if consensus has not been reached, the repetition process will continue until consensus is reached.

The individuals selected for this Delphi study involved 176 lodging representatives from four and five star hotels in Peninsular Malaysia. The research sample for Delphi needs to consider the opinions of experts in terms of: knowledge and experience of the issue being studied; capacity and willingness to participate in the Delphi; sufficient time for participation and effective communication (Adler & Ziglio, 1996). Therefore, identified lodging representatives include those with expertise in the hospitality industry, namely general managers, human resources managers, or industry experts holding other management positions directly involved in managing hotel operations. All identified lodging representatives were contacted via formal mail to inform them of the study and the possibility of multiple rounds being involved in the study. The first round of Delphi questionnaires was also distributed to all 176 lodging representatives by post. Lodging representatives were contacted in June 2014 and given one month to complete the questionnaire and return it to the researcher at the end of July using the stamped envelope provided in the first round of questionnaire distribution. This research has completed the first round of Delphi.

Therefore, this paper will only report the analysis and findings from the first round of research. Of the 176 lodging representatives selected from four and five star hotels in Peninsular Malaysia, 32 lodging representatives responded to this research. According to Cavalli-Sforza and Ortolano (1984) Delphi panels usually consist of 8 to 12 members while 7 to 12 members are considered the optimal size for a Delphi (Phillips, 2000).

The first round of the questionnaire consists of two parts, part A consists of questions that require participants to fill in their profiles such as gender, age, organizational profile, current position and number of years working in the industry. Part B requires participants to assess competency statements as to whether they do or do not represent the competencies of hospitality graduates and a description column is provided at the end of each competency statement to encourage participants to suggest additional competencies that they think are important for hospitality graduates but are not listed in the questionnaire. Based on previous literature studies, 69 hospitality competencies were identified.

The first round of questionnaires was analyzed using the 2014 version of the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) Software. Descriptive statistics, frequencies and percentages were used to identify whether the items represented or did not represent the competencies of hospitality graduates as desired by the hotel industry. If the question item represents graduate competency, it is shown by a high score percentage, whereas if the score percentage is low or below 50%, then the question item is not important. Therefore, items that have a score percentage below 50% will not be included as competencies that must be obtained by hospitality graduates according to the industry perspective.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As stated, this paper will present the findings of the first round of Delphi. Table 1 shows the findings regarding the competencies of hospitality graduates according to the perception of the hotel industry. 11 competency items obtained a percentage score of 100% as competencies that must be represented by hospitality graduates. The 11 items are communication skills (oral, professional writing, and email etiquette); ability to take on additional responsibilities; show a sense of responsibility; professional grooming and appearance; knowledge of general hotel operations; ability to work as a team; managing personal stress and controlling emotions; demonstrate listening skills; demonstrate time management skills; positive thinking when facing adversity and flexible team player. The other 10 items were assessed with a percentage of 96.9% and were declared as competency items with the second highest percentage for hospitality graduates. These things are a commitment to high performance; ability to

multitask; ability to prioritize tasks; develop effective working relationships with peers, managers, representatives and outside agencies; have basic problem solving skills; computer knowledge of standard Microsoft office applications (e.g. word processing, spreadsheets, databases); maintain professional and ethical standards in the work environment; able to work independently and without close supervision; demonstrated operational and supervisory skills and demonstrated ability to work in a pressurized environment. Only three items obtained a percentage of 68.8% which shows the lowest percentage of hospitality graduate competencies. These three items are the ability to analyze financial reports; able to develop marketing plans and knowledge of multiple languages. There is also one other item, namely the ability to interpret financial reports, which received the second lowest percentage, namely 71.9%. Even though these four competency items received the lowest and second lowest percentages, the percentage figures are still above the 50% percentage. These 69 competency items are still considered important competencies for hotel graduates from the perspective of the hotel industry. Therefore, in the second round, all 69 competency items were still included in the questionnaire development and questionnaire distribution.

Table 1.
Competencies for Hospitality Graduates

No.	Competencies Items	Percentage (%)
1	Communication skills (oral, professional writing and email etiquette)	100
2	Delivering exceptional and consistent customer service	93.8
3	Commitment to high performance	96.9
4	People (HR) skills	93.8
5	Ability to perform multi-tasking	96.9
6	Ability to prioritize task	96.9
7	Ability to train others	84.4
8	Ability to motivate others	87.5
9	Ability to handle change creatively	84.4
10	Ability to handle change effectively	90.6
11	Ability to analyze financial statements	68.8
12	Ability to interpret financial statements	71.9
13	Ability to develop management skills	87.5
14	Ability to take on additional responsibilities	100
15	Demonstrate sense of responsibilities	100

16	Develop effective working relationship with fellow associates, managers, outside representatives and agencies	96.9
17	Possesses basic problem solving skills	96.9
18	Possesses strong analytical skills	81.3
19	Professional grooming and appearance	100
20	Possesses sales skills	84.4
21	Computer knowledge on standard Microsoft office applications, e.g. word processor, spreadsheets, databases	96.9
22	Effective influence skills	81.3
23	Knowledge of inventory and cost control	78.1
24	Knowledge on general hotel operations	100
25	Knowledge on technology	75.0
26	Able to develop a marketing plan	68.8
27	Able to develop staffing schedules	90.6
28	Able to forecast revenues and staffing needs	81.3
29	Able to identify target markets	78.1
30	Knowledge of health, safety and hygiene	93.8
31	Managing crisis situations: fire; employees or guest injuries; earthquake and other disasters	87.5
32	Able to develop positive customer relations	93.8
33	Knowledge on customer service	93.8
34	Possesses a leadership abilities	93.8
35	Ability to work as a team	100
36	Managing personal stress and emotional control	100
37	Supervising subordinates	90.6
38	Using ethics in decision making	93.8
39	Able to write a standard operating procedure (SOP)	81.3
40	Able to write a simple business report	84.4
41	Systematically trace and identify operational problems	84.4
42	Implement internal control systems in response to an identified problem	78.1
43	Delegate responsibility and authority	84.4
44	Manage meetings to ensure productivity	78.1
45	Maintain professional and ethical standards in the work environment	96.9

46	Demonstrate empathy in dealing with customers and staff	90.6
47	Demonstrate listening skills	100
48	Demonstrate cultural awareness in dealings with staff and guests	93.8
49	Give and receive feedback on performance	93.8
50	Set personal objectives	93.8
51	Develop a personal career plan	93.8
52	Demonstrate time management skills	100
53	Able to work independently and without close supervision	96.9
54	Understand unique characteristics of lodging industry	81.3
55	Able to communicate effectively across different departments	90.6
56	Positive thinking while facing difficulty	100
57	Knowledge of multiple languages	68.8
58	Able to develop workflow according to specific operations	81.3
59	Ability to use developed technology to assist in daily hotel operations	87.5
60	Assist in promotional activities and public relation strategies	87.5
61	Operationally focused and flexible	90.6
62	Possesses high level of personal skills	87.5
63	Emphasize personal development, prioritized training and on- the- job opportunities	93.8
64	Flexible team player	100
65	Demonstrate operations and supervisory skills	96.9
66	Demonstrate ability to work in a pressurized environment	96.9
67	Ability to adhere to standard operating procedures (SOPs) and other hotel policies and procedures	87.5
68	Understand basic building utilities and facilities	81.3
69	Understand and implement measures for energy efficiency in hotels and protect the environment	84.4

CONCLUSION

This paper provides insight into the competencies required of hospitality management graduates. Based on previous research, the competencies required for hospitality graduates may vary slightly according to the country where the research was conducted. Previous literature shows that the most highly rated competencies for hospitality graduates include good interpersonal skills, social skills, leadership skills, problem-solving skills, and teamwork. This study revealed that the competencies that the hotel industry requires from hotel graduates are communication skills, teamwork competencies, interpersonal skills, people skills, time management skills, good stress management, positive thinking, flexible team players and knowledge of hotel operations in general . However, this conclusion is based only on limited findings from the first Delphi round. The study is now in its second Delphi round and requires further analysis before a consensus on hospitality competencies is reached.

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