Developing a Competency Framework for Enhancing4 Service Excellence among Hospitality Employees in Thailand

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Abstract. This research analyzes competency components critical for hospitality employees in Thailand via a survey of 500 industry professionals. Factor analysis of questionnaire data pointed to four key constructs: technical enhancement, soft skills, technical proficiency, and competency development. Structural equation modeling reveals positive, significant relationships between these components. Finding underlined competency development strategies involving virtual/e-learning, problem-solving, customer service, and time management. Practical and policy recommendations center on the integration of technical and soft skills for service excellence.

Keywords: Employee competency, Soft skill, Hospitality industry, Service excellence, Human resource

1. Introduction

The hospitality industry is a quickly growing industry, where the main factors are service quality and customer satisfaction. No property in the hospitality industry will be serviced if they are not oriented on their consumers, notably, to meet their needs, requirements, and expectations, so that the image of the company will be enhanced. (Ali et al., 2021) The hospitality industry is a service that is intangible; everything cannot be fixed, like material things. Service quality is represented by three dimensions in the hospitality industry, relating to employees (behavior and appearance), tangibles, and reliability. (Ooi Mei, Dean, & White, 1999). The value of the service therefore depends on the satisfaction of the customer. Each customer has different needs. It is difficult to define or frame so that all customers are satisfied by personnel actions. Human resources are valuable assets for an organization. Human resources are responsible for managing other resources into service output. Therefore, skills and competencies must be developed to lead to success and create maximum value for the hospitality industry. (Boonlert, 2008) Service innovation is critical for service improvement and development that enhances customer satisfaction. (Truong et al., 2020) The hospitality industry is an industry that requires human resources as a mechanism to impress customers, and when there is good service, it will generate revenue, which is the main income of the hospitality business that tends to grow continuously. (Al Hrou and Mohamed, 2014) Therefore, the competency of personnel in the organization is an important element in enabling the organization to achieve its goals and can increase the competitiveness of the organization. (Thuen, 2019). Given the importance of personnel competency development to increase the capabilities of the organization, as mentioned above, the researcher is therefore interested in studying the approaches for managing personnel competency in the hospitality industry. To study what the employee competency development model in the hospitality industry looks like. The researcher hopes that the results of this research will be useful for the private sector to be used as a guideline for developing the competency of personnel in the hospitality industry of the organization in the future.

2. Literature Review

The researcher has compiled important content about the competency development model of employees in the hospitality industry as follows.

2.1 Employee development Based on Competency

Human resource development in the organization is an activity that aims to bring results directly to the personnel. The activity is divided into three parts: 1) education for the goals of the organization in the future; 2) training to increase skills related to current work; and 3) development to aim at changing the behavior of personnel. There were many ways to develop human resources. Both formal and informal, such as orientation education, individual development, and career development. Personnel development is therefore extremely important to the organization. It can help increase the operational potential of personnel to be as efficient and effective as the organization needs. The development process of the organization shall take into account the skills of the job based on the competencies needed and appropriate to the performance of the personnel in each function and position in the organization. The concept of competency focuses on the knowledge and competency of people related to performance skills in a particular area. It is often used to relate abilities. (Nadler & Nadler, 1980) Intelligence (IQ) and personality tests are not suitable for evaluating performance or predicting a person's abilities. Because it did not reflect true competence, competency could measure and predict success in performance better. (McClelland, 1975) The basic characteristics of competency consist of five: 1) knowledge refers to information and learning in an individual; 2) skill refers to a person's ability to perform tasks; 3) self-concept and self-worth refer to a person's attitude, values, and self-image; 4) character means physical appearance and responses that are consistent with the situation; and 5) motivation refers to emotions, needs, or a similar impulse ready to act. (Vazirani, 2010) The hospitality industry has witnessed significant technological advancements in recent years, transforming various aspects of guest experiences, operations, and management. Key areas of enhancement include guest

experience and personalization, employee scheduling and task management software, predictive analytics for demand forecasting and pricing strategies, and feedback analysis to improve guest satisfaction. (Sigala, 2017)

2.2 Employee Competency

Personal competency was a trait that was hidden within a person. These characteristics would drive individuals to achieve higher or higher performance in their responsibilities. (McClelland, 1975) Competency was a combination of knowledge. Skills and attitudes influence a person's job and can be measured by established and accepted standards within the organization. (Sharma, 2017) The basic characteristics of a person include motivation, character, skills, and self-image, or social role or knowledge, that people need to use in their work to achieve results higher than the specified criteria or goals. (Boyatiz, 1982). A set of behavioral attributes that a person needs to perform in a particular position to successfully perform their job responsibilities. The basic characteristics that exist within a person, such as motivation, character, self-concept, knowledge, and skills, will drive or have a rational relationship to enable a person to perform his responsibilities or different situations effectively or higher than the specified goals. (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Competency therefore reflects the performance of personnel in the use of organizational resources. The achievement of personal and organizational goals depends on the management system within the organization. Continuous technology changes internal and external environments, and we still need to know how to respond and make the right decisions in these changing situations. (Alainati, 2009) for guidelines to develop work to meet the objectives of the organization. According to the level of competence of personnel to be able to improve and develop the behavior of personnel to suit the job and be able to work successfully according to the needs of the organization, performance can be divided into 3 categories: 1) core competencies are people's characteristics that reflect the knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, and character of people in the organization as a whole that will help support the organization in achieving its vision goals. 2) functional competencies are a person's personality that reflects knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, and habits that will help encourage that person to be able to produce higher than standard performance in that position: and 3) personal competencies are a person's personality that reflects knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, and character that make a person capable of doing something to stand out from the crowd. (Dales & Hes, 1995) Soft skills, also known as interpersonal skills or people skills, play a crucial role in the hospitality industry. While technical expertise is important, it's the soft skills that often differentiate outstanding service providers and create memorable guest experiences. Key soft skills relevant to the hospitality industry include communication skills, customer service, problem-solving, teamwork, and adaptability (Woods & King, 2017).

2.3 Human Resource Development

Human resource development is a process to improve and develop human resources in an organization. Including improving the performance of personnel systematically through the process of training. Education and development lead to goals that affect the organization and its personnel. (Noe, Hollenbeck, & Wright, 2015). In an era of rapid change and intense competition in today's global society, organizations must focus on strategic human resource development. In order to maintain greatness throughout time, a company needs to be able to adapt to change and invest in knowledge management and human resources. Predicting change and being able to determine the trend of change as well as the ability to ultimately lead the change. (Kanyamon, 2015). Human resource development was about learning to improve work. It involved constantly improving human beings to compete. (York, 2005) Human resource development is a process within an organization. It consists of skillful planning and support to provide learning in both formal and informal forms. The process of creating knowledge and experience both in the workplace and elsewhere for the advancement of the organization and increasing the potential of personnel could bring talent, adaptability, cooperation, and activities that create new knowledge of people in the organization (Harisson & Kesslers, 2004). Personnel development in the organization focuses on enhancing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of personnel to achieve learning

and create good performance in the organization, which is similar to training. Training will create activities to increase the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of personnel to be able to work in their current positions efficiently. (Mondy & Martocchio, 2016) Competency development in the hospitality industry refers to the process of acquiring, improving, and mastering the skills, knowledge, and attributes required for successful performance in various roles within the industry. Effective competency development is crucial for enhancing guest experiences, employee satisfaction, and overall business success. Key aspects of competency development in the hospitality industry include training and development programs, leadership and management competencies, customer service excellence, and cultural awareness and diversity. (Hayes & Ninemeier, 2017) In the new millennium, human resource management in the hospitality industry will focus on talent management, a reassessment of what strategic human resource management means in terms of structure, and human capital and knowledge management will become key themes for organizations. (Popescu & Avram, 2012) Diverse human resource activities are the means to inspire and motivate employees. Empowerment, continuous training, and the use of rewards for new ideas also play a major role in preserving human capital and creating service. Therefore, modern human resource departments realize that the satisfaction of the internal customer (the employee) leads to the satisfaction of the external customer (the customer). (Mahmoud et al., 2021)

2.4 Service Quality

Service quality was related to customer needs and expectations. Each customer group would inevitably have different needs and expectations. Service providers in the service industry must be able to meet the needs of different customers with quality service. To be competitive and sustainable in their business (Drummond & Anderson, 2004), service quality for service businesses, could be measured from five aspects with a tool called SERVQUAL Dimension (RATER) as follows: 1) the tangible aspect of the service was the physical representation of the service; 2) reliability was the ability to provide services as promised reliably and accurately from the first time; 3) responding to customers willingness to help customers and provide prompt service; 4) making customers confident personnel with knowledge; courteous, able to make customers trust and believe; and 5) understanding customers, paying attention to customers, able to offer services tailored to the needs of each customer (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1990). Technical proficiency refers to the mastery of specific skills and competencies that are essential for effectively performing tasks within the hospitality industry. These skills are directly related to the operational aspects of the industry and contribute to the overall guest experience. Key areas of technical proficiency in the hospitality industry include front-office operations, event planning and management, and technology utilization (Kusluvan et al., 2010). Good services promote and increase value for consumers. It brings clarity and creative thinking to promote good service to customers as well as profitability. (Ramart, Sawangrat, & Silpcharu, 2023) We argue that customers' needs are less uniform, and so their expectations, perceptions, satisfaction, and loyalty vary across their characteristics. (Malik et al., 2020) Consumer loyalty and the management of their assumptions are an essential segment of the maintainability of any association. It is contended that these two vital parts are the main highlights that produce client loyalty and wanted maintenance. (Shafiq Ur Rechman & Pal, 2020)

3. Research Methodology

This study was a quantitative study, and data was gathered by using a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was built on a 5-point scale by the researcher with the aid of previous studies. (Ali et al. (2021); Lv et al. (2022); Al-Gasawneh et al. (2021)) and by checking the questionnaire-objective correspondence index (IOC). It obtained a score between 0.80 and 1.00. After that, the questionnaire was used for testing. The analysis of discrimination, classified by each item, returned a value between 0.50-1.61, while the confidence of the questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha

coefficient) achieved a value of 0.99. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select the respondents for this research. In the case of a model with no more than 7 latent factors, the sample size should be not less than 300 samples. (Hair et al., 2017) In this study, the sample consisted of 500 selected respondents from companies in the hospitality industry in Thailand. (National Statistical Office, 2017)

The determination of the sample size was done by making use of the criteria of element analysis and a structural equation model. By dividing companies into two sizes based on the number of employees, Silpcharu (2020) suggested a cluster sampling approach and employed a multi-stage sampling method to estimate the sample size. The data for this study is analyzed using IBM SPSS version 23 and the Structural Equation Model (SEM). Criteria for assessing the conformity of the structural equation model consisted of 4 values as follows: CMIN-p > 0.05, CMIN/DF < 2, GFI > 0.90, and RMSEA < 0.08 (Arbuckle, 2016)
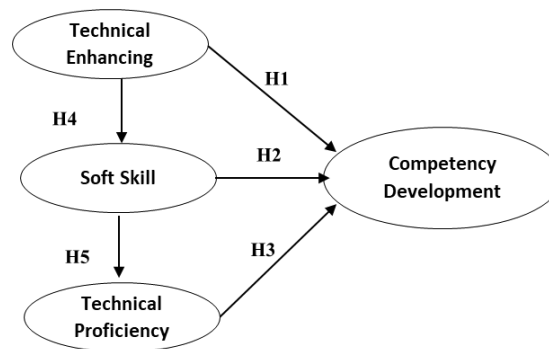

Fig. 1: Conceptual Model

3.1 Research Hypothesis

In order to test the research model, the study in hypothesized as follows:

H1: There is a significant effect of technical enhancing on competency development.

H2: There is a significant effect of soft skill on competency development.

H3: There is a significant effect of technical proficiency on competency development.

H4: There is a significant effect of technical enhancing on soft skill.

H5: There is a significant effect of soft skill on technical proficiency.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Data Analysis

The results of this research indicate that the mean, standard deviation, significant level, t-value, and P-value of each component are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Importance level of the employee competency development model

Component	Mean	SD.	Significant level	t-value	p-value
Technical enhancing	4.50	0.26	High	3.22	0.00*
Competency development	4.51	0.25	Very high	2.40	0.02*
Soft skill	4.40	0.26	High	1.86	0.07
Technical proficiency	4.34	0.24	High	0.14	0.89

*Significant at 0.05 level

According to an analysis of the employee competency development model component in the

hospitality sector, competency development (mean = 4.51) was found to be the most valuable component, followed by technical proficiency (mean = 4.34), soft skills (mean = 4.40), and technical enhancement (mean = 4.50). The findings indicate that there is significance in technical enhancement (t = 3.22, p < 0.01) and competency development (t = 2.40, p < 0.05). However, there is no significance to soft skills or technical proficiency. The findings indicate that there is significance in technical enhancement (t = 3.22, p < 0.01) and competency development (t = 2.40, p < 0.05). However, there is no significance to soft skills or technical proficiency.

4.2 Structural Equation Model

The structural equation model is an ideal data analysis method for examining complex relationships among multiple analytical variables. It is used to test the degree to which a hypothesized model accurately represents the interrelationships among its variables. The bootstrapping process, which involves generating a large number of samples, was employed to check for errors and calculate the P-values to determine the significance of the measurement model at a 5% significance level. The analysis of the model was provided in the standardized estimate mode following the model update is shown in Figure 2 in order to create a structural equation model of the employee competency development model in the hospitality industry.
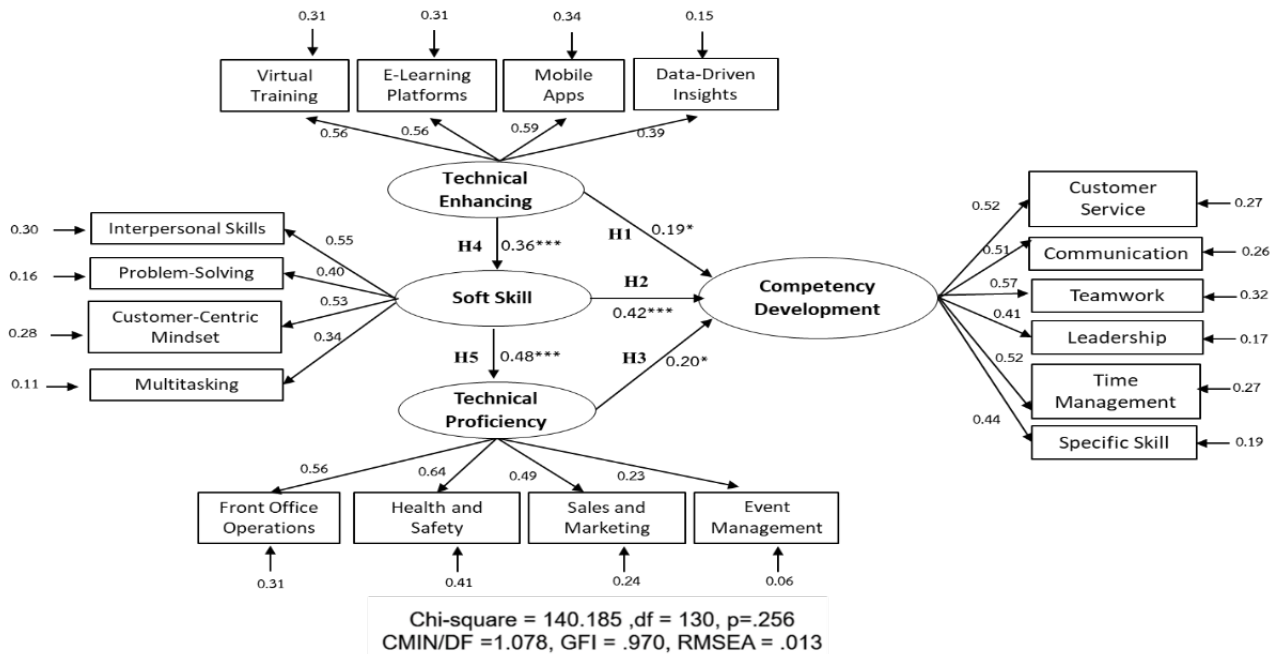

Fig. 2: A structural equation model in standardized estimate mode after model improvement.

Note: * It was statistically significant at the level of 0.05,
    *** It was statistically significant at the level of 0.001

The results of the hypothesis testing to analyze employee competency development model in the hospitality industry revealed 5 hypotheses as follows

H1: Technical enhancing has direct influence on competency development at the statistically significant of 0.05 with the standardized regression weights 0.19.

H2: Soft skill has direct influence on competency development at the statistically significant of 0.001 with the standardized regression weights 0.42.

H3: Technical proficiency has direct influence on competency development at the statistically significant of 0.05 with the standardized regression weights 0.20.

H4: Technical enhancing has direct influence on soft skill at the statistically significant of 0.001 with the standardized regression weights 0.36.

H5: Soft skill has direct influence on technical proficiency at the statistically significant of 0.001 with the standardized regression weights 0.48.

Table 2: Statistics from structural equation modeling analysis after improving the model

Variables	Estimate		R^2	Variance	C.R.	P
	Standard	Unstandard				
Technical enhancing				0.12		
Competency development	0.19	0.14	0.40	0.04	2.30	0.02
Soft skill	0.36	0.33	0.13	0.08	4.18	***
Soft skill			0.13	0.08		
Competency development	0.42	0.34	0.40	0.04	3.66	***
Technical proficiency	0.48	0.44	0.23	0.06	4.82	***
Technical proficiency			0.23	0.06		
Competency development	0.20	0.18	0.40	0.04	2.30	0.02
Technical enhancing				0.12		
Virtual training	0.56	1.00	0.31	0.26		
E-Learning platforms	0.56	0.97	0.31	0.25	7.18	***
Mobiles apps	0.59	0.98	0.34	0.22	7.25	***
Data-driven insights	0.39	0.63	0.15	0.27	5.89	***
Soft skill						
Interpersonal skills	0.55	1.00	0.30	0.22		
Problem solving	0.40	0.79	0.16	0.32	5.80	***
Customer-centric mindset	0.53	0.94	0.28	0.23	6.69	***
Multitasking	0.34	0.63	0.11	0.30	5.15	***
Technical proficiency						
Front office operations	0.56	1.00	0.31	0.19		
Health and safety	0.64	1.26	0.41	0.19	7.19	***
Sales and marketing	0.49	0.94	0.24	0.23	6.79	***
Event management	0.23	0.45	0.06	0.29	3.92	***
Competency development						
Customer service	0.52	1.00	0.27	0.17		
Communication	0.51	1.02	0.26	0.19	7.51	***
Teamwork	0.57	1.14	0.32	0.17	7.93	***
Leadership	0.41	0.83	0.17	0.22	6.49	***
Time management	0.52	1.08	0.27	0.20	7.54	***
Specific skill	0.44	0.90	0.19	0.22	6.80	***

*** Significant at the level of 0.001

Figure 1 and Table 2 present a structural equation model of the employee competency development model in the hospitality industry after the model improvement. The figures indicate the technical enhancing component, whose variance is 0.12 and which directly influences the element of soft skill at the standardized regression weight of 0.36. It is statistically significant at the 0.001 level ($R2 = 0.13$). When the variance is 0.08, it directly influences competency development at the standardized regression weights of 0.19 and is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The squared multiple correlations (R2) show 0.40 when the variance is 0.04. The component of soft skill, if the variance is 0.08, directly influences the component of competency at the standardized regression weight of 0.42 and is statistically significant at the 0.001 level ($R2 = 0.40$). When the variance is 0.04, it directly influences the technical proficiency component at the standardized regression weight of 0.48 and is statistically significant at the 0.001 level ($R2 = 0.40$). Technical proficiency has a direct impact on competency at

the standardized regression weight of 0.20 when the variance is 0.06, and when the variance is 0.04, it is statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($R^2 = 0.40$)

4.3 Discussion

This research has studied key issues concerning the employee competency development model in the hospitality industry. Through the findings of employee competency development, this study has given an overview of what sort of employee competency will be needed in the transition phase that may significantly contribute to improving the development of employee competency in the hospitality industry. The findings in this study can be used to set standards of competency in the employee hospitality industry. The results are all supported by Okoye and Michael (2015), who state that it is the process of measuring employee skills, knowledge, and understanding against the standard (occupational standard) laid down for a particular unit. The survey indicated that competency development had the greatest average of 4.51, followed by technical enhancement with an average of 4.50, provided the person can demonstrate it by producing adequate proof of their ability. Soft skills and technical proficiency received an average of 4.40 and 4.34, respectively. Soft skills and competency development were proven to have a direct impact on the relevance of technological enhancement. Similarly, soft skills directly influence competency and technical proficiency. The respondent's level of knowledge and skill in most of the crucial elements and components is needed for employee competency. (Ismail and Hassan, 2019) Soft skills help to ensure the employee's ability. Soft skill is an umbrella team for skills under three key functional elements: people skills, social skills, and personal career attributes. (Vasanthakumari, 2019) Moreover, technical proficiency has a direct influence on competency development. It corresponds to Ng and Kee (2018), who observed that there is a link between transformational leadership and process innovation in all relationships linking transformational leadership, entrepreneurial competence, and technical competence with innovativeness.

5. Conclusion

The competency model provides empirical validation regarding the technical and social competencies hospitality employees should acquire. Investment in training programs, management leadership, and technology integration is imperative for competency augmentation. Targeted content customized for Thai culture can ensure contextual relevance.

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