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OPTIMIZING WORKFORCE COMPETENCIES IN NORTHERN THAILAND'S HOTEL SECTOR: A MIXED-METHODS DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

This study investigates job performance competencies among hotel personnel in Northern Thailand and proposes targeted human resource strategies to elevate regional hospitality standards. Employing a mixed-methods design, quantitative data from 230 hotel employees were triangulated with in-depth qualitative insights from 15 human resource managers. Statistical analyses revealed that overall competencies are remarkably high in personal traits and self-concept, though technical skills require further enhancement. Significant competency variations emerged by age, education, income, professional experience, and job position, whereas gender had no significant impact. Notably, employees with greater operational experience and formal education exhibited superior performance capabilities. Qualitative findings underscore the urgent necessity for structured mentoring, digital upskilling, and robust motivational support. Ultimately, this research bridges theory and organizational practice by offering a four-dimensional development framework focusing on knowledge, skills, self-concept, and motivation. These evidence-based guidelines empower administrators to optimize workforce capabilities, ensure consistent service excellence, and sustain competitive advantage in the dynamic tourism landscape.

Keywords: Job Performance Competency, Human Resource Development, Hospitality Management, Workforce Optimization, Northern Thailand

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Introduction

The tourism and hospitality industries have undergone substantial transformation in recent decades due to globalization, technological advancements, and evolving consumer expectations. As one of the most dynamic service sectors in the global economy, tourism contributes significantly to employment generation, economic growth, and cross-cultural exchange. Hotels, in particular, play a central role in the tourism value chain by providing accommodation services and facilitating interactions between travelers and local communities. Because hospitality services are largely intangible and highly dependent on human interaction, the quality of employee performance has become a decisive factor influencing customer satisfaction and organizational success (Baum, 2007). In this context, employee competency has emerged as a critical organizational resource that determines service quality, operational efficiency, and long-term competitiveness within the hospitality sector.

In modern hospitality management, competency is increasingly recognized not only as an individual characteristic but also as a strategic asset that contributes to sustainable organizational performance. Competency encompasses a combination of knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, and personal attributes that enable individuals to perform tasks effectively and achieve superior outcomes. Organizations that successfully cultivate employee competencies are better positioned to enhance service quality, maintain customer loyalty, and adapt to rapidly changing market conditions (Boyatzis, 2008). As competition intensifies in the global tourism industry, hotels must continually invest in human resource development to sustain service excellence and remain competitive in increasingly demanding markets.

The importance of workforce competencies has become even more pronounced with the rapid integration of digital technologies in the hospitality industry. The proliferation of online booking platforms, property management systems, artificial intelligence-based customer service tools, and digital marketing strategies has fundamentally transformed hotel operations. According to the World Economic Forum (2023), the future of work in service industries will require employees who possess a combination of technological literacy, interpersonal communication skills, and adaptive learning capabilities. In the hospitality sector, employees must now navigate complex technological systems while simultaneously maintaining high levels of service quality and customer engagement. Consequently, the development of multidimensional competencies, including technical skills, emotional intelligence, and intercultural communication abilities, has become essential for hospitality professionals operating in an increasingly digitalized environment (Nickson, 2013).

These global developments are particularly significant for Thailand, where tourism represents a major driver of national economic growth. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Thailand consistently ranked among the world's leading tourism destinations, welcoming millions of international visitors annually. The tourism industry contributes substantially to national income, employment opportunities, and regional development. Within Thailand, the northern region, particularly the provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Mae Hong Son, has become one of the country's most prominent tourism clusters. The region attracts both domestic and international tourists due to its rich cultural heritage, distinctive traditions, and diverse natural landscapes. As a result, the hotel industry in Northern Thailand plays a vital role in supporting local economic activity and promoting sustainable tourism development.

Despite strong tourism growth in the region, the hotel sector in Northern Thailand faces several challenges related to workforce competency development. Previous research suggests that hospitality employees in many developing tourism destinations often lack the competencies required to meet international service standards, particularly in areas such as foreign language proficiency, cross-cultural communication, and technological literacy (Kanchanasilanon, 2013). These competency gaps may hinder service quality and reduce the competitiveness of local hotels in global tourism markets. Moreover, small and medium-sized hotels often face

constraints related to training resources, human resource development systems, and access to professional development opportunities. As a result, many hospitality organizations struggle to cultivate a workforce capable of delivering consistently high service standards.

The importance of competency development has become even more evident in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly disrupted the global tourism and hospitality industries. The pandemic resulted in widespread layoffs, labor shortages, and structural changes in hospitality operations. As the industry moves toward recovery, hotels must increasingly rely on employees who possess resilience, adaptability, and technological competence to operate effectively in uncertain environments. The World Tourism Organization (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2018) highlights that the future competitiveness of tourism destinations will depend largely on organizations' ability to develop highly skilled human resources capable of responding to crises and adapting to changing market conditions. From a theoretical perspective, the concept of competency has been extensively examined within the fields of human resource management and organizational behavior. McClelland (1973) was among the first scholars to challenge traditional indicators of job performance, such as intelligence quotient and academic credentials, arguing that behavioral competencies better explain successful job performance. According to McClelland, competencies represent underlying characteristics that influence an individual's ability to perform effectively in specific job roles. Building upon this conceptual foundation, Spencer & Spencer (1993) developed a comprehensive competency framework that identifies several core competency components, including knowledge, skills, self-concept, traits, and motivation. This model has been widely applied in organizational research and has become a cornerstone of competency-based human resource management practices.

In the hospitality industry, competencies extend beyond technical knowledge and operational expertise. Service delivery involves complex interpersonal interactions between employees and guests, requiring emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, problem-solving ability, and effective communication skills. These competencies significantly influence guest satisfaction and overall service quality. As a result, many hospitality organizations have adopted competency-based human resource management systems that integrate competency frameworks into recruitment, training, performance evaluation, and career development processes (Boyatzis, 2008; Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

Globally, competency-based training (CBT) has also been adopted as a key strategy for workforce development. Several countries, including Singapore, Japan, and South Korea, have implemented national competency frameworks designed to align vocational education systems with labor market demands and enhance workforce adaptability in rapidly evolving service sectors (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019). These initiatives demonstrate how competency-based approaches can strengthen human capital development while simultaneously improving organizational performance and national competitiveness.

Despite the increasing emphasis on competency development in international research, much of the existing literature has focused primarily on Western organizational contexts. Fewer studies have examined competency development in Southeast Asian hospitality environments, where cultural values, institutional structures, and labor market conditions may differ substantially from those in Western economies. In Thailand, for example, cultural characteristics such as collectivism, respect for hierarchy, and interpersonal harmony may influence workplace relationships, leadership styles, and employee behavior. These cultural dynamics may shape how competencies are developed and applied within hospitality organizations.

Given these contextual differences, empirical research examining competency development in specific regional settings remains essential. In particular, limited research has explored how demographic and professional characteristics influence job performance competencies among

hotel personnel in Northern Thailand. Understanding these relationships is important for designing targeted training programs and human resource development strategies that address the needs of the regional hospitality workforce.

Accordingly, this study aims to address this research gap by examining job performance competencies among hotel personnel in Northern Thailand. Specifically, the objectives of this study are threefold: 1) to assess the level of job performance competencies among hotel employees in the region; 2) to compare competency levels across demographic and professional characteristics, including gender, age, education, income, work experience, and job position; and 3) to propose practical development guidelines aimed at enhancing workforce competencies within the hotel industry of Northern Thailand.

By integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative insights from human resource professionals, this study seeks to contribute to the growing body of research on hospitality workforce development and provide evidence-based recommendations for strengthening human resource management and promoting sustainable growth in Thailand's tourism industry.

Literature Review

Human Resource Management in Hospitality

Human resource management (HRM) has evolved from a purely administrative function into a strategic system that shapes organizational capability and competitive advantage. Contemporary HRM emphasizes the acquisition, development, and retention of human capital in order to achieve performance objectives in dynamic and competitive environments (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). This strategic orientation is particularly important in the hospitality industry, where service quality is closely linked to employee behavior and where the "service encounter" often forms the primary basis for customer evaluation. Because hotel services are intangible, heterogeneous, and co-produced through employee-guest interactions, HRM practices such as recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and career development directly influence guest satisfaction and organizational outcomes (Baum, 2007; Nickson, 2013). Effective HRM systems therefore align workforce competencies with organizational goals while also supporting employee engagement, learning, and retention.

Competency

The competency approach emerged as a response to the limitations of traditional indicators of job performance. McClelland (1998) argued that intelligence tests and academic credentials often fail to predict workplace effectiveness, proposing instead that competencies are observable and behaviorally anchored characteristics that better explain superior job performance. Spencer & Spencer (1993) later defined competencies as underlying attributes that influence effective work behavior, including knowledge, skills, self-concept, traits, and motives. In HRM practice, competency models provide a structured framework for aligning employee capabilities with organizational strategy and role requirements (Boyatzis, 2008). In the hospitality sector, competencies extend beyond technical knowledge and operational procedures. Service delivery requires interpersonal skills such as empathy, communication ability, teamwork, and intercultural awareness (Nickson, 2013). Competency therefore functions as a multidimensional construct that integrates technical expertise with behavioral attributes. As hotels increasingly adopt digital platforms and data-driven systems, employees must also develop technological literacy and adaptability in order to meet evolving service expectations (World Economic Forum, 2023).

Job Performance in Service Contexts

Job performance refers to behaviors and outcomes that contribute to organizational goals. Campbell (1990) conceptualized job performance as measurable behavior influenced by individual ability, motivation, and learned competencies. In service industries such as

hospitality, performance typically includes both task performance, the completion of job duties according to operational standards, and contextual performance, which involves cooperation, adaptability, and proactive support for colleagues and customers. Sukiam & Likitsarun (2021) further emphasized process-oriented dimensions of performance, including teamwork and continuous improvement, which are particularly important in service environments where work processes are interdependent. Within hotel operations, frontline employee performance strongly influences customer perceptions of service quality. For instance, the professionalism and responsiveness of front-office staff shape guests' impressions of reliability and hospitality, while housekeeping performance influences perceptions of cleanliness and safety. Because service quality is experienced directly by customers, variations in employee competency can significantly affect satisfaction and brand reputation (Nickson, 2013).

Competency-Based HRM and Organizational Performance

Competency-based HRM integrates competency frameworks into key human resource practices, including recruitment, training, performance management, and career development (Boyatzis, 2008). This approach provides clear behavioral expectations for employees and helps organizations identify competency gaps that require targeted training interventions. In hospitality settings, competency-based HRM can standardize service quality while allowing employees to develop role-specific capabilities (Dubois et al., 2004). Competency requirements often vary across hotel departments due to differences in task structure and interaction intensity. For example, front office employees require strong communication and interpersonal skills, while housekeeping staff rely more heavily on procedural accuracy and time management. Such variation highlights the importance of examining competency differences across job positions and employee characteristics.

Organizational Perspectives: Resource-Based View and Social Capital

To complement competency theory, broader organizational perspectives provide additional insight into how employee competencies contribute to performance outcomes. The resource-based view (RBV) suggests that organizations achieve sustainable competitive advantage when they possess valuable, inimitable resources, including skilled human capital (Barney, 1991). From this perspective, employee competencies represent strategic resources that support organizational performance. Similarly, social capital theory emphasizes the importance of relationships, trust, and knowledge sharing within organizations (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). In hotel operations, effective coordination among departments such as front office, housekeeping, and food and beverage often depends on collaborative relationships and shared understanding. These relational mechanisms can enhance the application of employee competencies and improve service outcomes.

Research Gap and Hypotheses

Although competency-based HRM has received considerable attention in international research, empirical studies examining competency patterns within Southeast Asian hospitality contexts remain limited. Northern Thailand is a distinctive tourism destination, characterized by diverse hotel operations and growing international visitor flows (Ogola et al., 2023). Previous studies indicate that hospitality employees in the region may face challenges related to foreign language proficiency, intercultural communication, and technological skills (Kanchanasilanon, 2013). However, limited research has examined how demographic and professional characteristics influence competency levels within this regional workforce. Accordingly, this study proposes that job performance competency among hotel personnel in Northern Thailand varies according to demographic and occupational characteristics. Based on the reviewed literature, the following hypotheses are proposed: H1: Job performance competency differs significantly by gender among hotel personnel in Northern Thailand. H2: Job performance competency differs significantly by age among hotel personnel in Northern Thailand. H3: Job performance competency differs significantly by educational attainment

among hotel personnel in Northern Thailand. H4: Job performance competency differs significantly by monthly income among hotel personnel in Northern Thailand. H5: Job performance competency differs significantly by work experience among hotel personnel in Northern Thailand; and H6: Job performance competency differs significantly by job position among hotel personnel in Northern Thailand. These hypotheses provide a framework for analyzing competency differences among hotel employees and for developing practical strategies to enhance workforce competencies within the hospitality industry of Northern Thailand.

Research Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods research design integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine job performance competencies among hotel personnel in Northern Thailand. The mixed-methods approach enables researchers to combine statistical analysis with contextual insights, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of complex organizational phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this research, quantitative survey data were used to examine patterns and levels of competency among hotel employees. At the same time, qualitative interviews with human resources (HR) managers provided deeper explanations of organizational strategies and practices for competency development in the hospitality industry.

Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of two groups: 1) hotel employees and 2) human resource managers working in hotels across Northern Thailand. The geographical scope included nine provinces recognized as major tourism destinations in the region: Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son, Phayao, Nan, Phrae, Lamphun, Lampang, and Tak. These provinces collectively represent one of the most significant tourism clusters in Thailand and host a wide range of accommodation establishments, ranging from boutique hotels to internationally affiliated hotel chains. Due to the confidential nature of employment records and the absence of publicly accessible workforce databases in the hospitality sector, the exact population size could not be determined. Therefore, structured sampling techniques were applied to obtain participants who represented relevant segments of the hotel workforce while ensuring feasibility within logistical and budgetary constraints. For the quantitative phase, 230 hotel employees were selected as respondents using a combination of purposive and multi-stage sampling techniques. Purposive sampling ensured that participants had direct operational experience in the hotel industry and were capable of providing meaningful information on competency development and job performance. Participants were required to meet several inclusion criteria. First, respondents had to be currently employed in the hotel sector within one of the designated provinces in Northern Thailand. Second, participants were required to have operational experience in hotel departments such as front office, housekeeping, food and beverage services, marketing, accounting, or related service areas. Third, respondents were required to voluntarily agree to participate in the research and provide informed consent. Several purposive sampling strategies were applied to enhance sample diversity. Maximum variation sampling was used to include employees with varying levels of work experience, including those with less than 5 years of service, 5 to 10 years of service, and more than 10 years of service. Homogeneous sampling focused on employees working in three- to five-star hotels in order to maintain a relatively consistent organizational environment. In addition, criterion sampling ensured that selected respondents had job responsibilities directly associated with customer service and operational performance. For the qualitative phase, 15 human resource managers working in hotels within the study region were selected through purposive sampling. Participants were selected for their professional roles in workforce development,

training management, and organizational performance evaluation, as well as their substantial experience in hotel human resource management.

Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure job performance competencies among hotel employees. The questionnaire items were developed based on established competency frameworks in human resource management and hospitality research, particularly the competency model proposed by Spencer & Spencer (1993). The instrument measured several competency dimensions, including knowledge, skills, self-concept, personal traits, and motivation. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of experts in hospitality management and human resource development. Experts evaluated the relevance and clarity of each item using the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) technique. The overall IOC value of the instrument was 0.895, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50 and indicating strong agreement among experts on the appropriateness of the measurement items. Items with lower IOC values were revised or removed to improve the instrument's quality. A pilot test was subsequently conducted with hotel employees not included in the final sample to identify ambiguous questions and refine the questionnaire structure. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which measures the internal consistency of multi-item measurement scales (Hair et al., 2019). The results indicated that all competency dimensions achieved Cronbach's alpha values greater than 0.70, suggesting that the instrument demonstrated satisfactory reliability for measuring job performance competencies among hotel personnel. For the qualitative component, in-depth interviews were conducted with the selected human resource managers. Semi-structured interview guidelines were used to guide the interviews, allowing participants to discuss competency development practices, training strategies, and challenges in managing hotel personnel.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using statistical techniques to identify patterns and levels of job performance competencies among hotel personnel. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and the distributions of competency variables. Qualitative data obtained from interviews were analyzed using content analysis, which systematically identifies themes, patterns, and meanings within qualitative information (Krippendorff, 2018). This method enabled the researcher to interpret managerial perspectives regarding competency development practices and organizational strategies within the hospitality sector. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings strengthened the methodological rigor of the study. Quantitative analysis identified statistical patterns and differences in competency levels among hotel personnel, while qualitative findings provided contextual explanations for these patterns. This methodological triangulation enhanced the credibility and interpretative validity of the research findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Research Ethics

The study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for research involving human participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Northern College prior to data collection (Approval No. NRED 0032/2568). Participants were provided with informed consent forms detailing the study's objectives, voluntary participation, confidentiality protection, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All collected data were anonymized and securely stored to ensure participant privacy and confidentiality. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the research and provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire or participating in interviews. To ensure confidentiality and privacy, no personally identifiable information was collected from respondents. All data were anonymized and used exclusively for academic

research purposes. Furthermore, collected data from questionnaires and interviews were securely stored and accessible only to the research team. These procedures ensured compliance with ethical standards for research involving human participants (Israel & Hay, 2006).

Research Results

The demographic profile of the respondents provides an overview of the workforce characteristics within the hotel industry in Northern Thailand. A total of 230 hotel personnel participated in the survey. The majority of respondents were female (69.1%), while males accounted for 30.9% of the sample. In terms of age distribution, the largest group of respondents was aged 36-40 years (30.9%), followed by those aged 31-35 years and 41-45 years. Regarding educational attainment, most respondents held an associate degree or equivalent qualification (38.3%), while smaller proportions reported bachelor's degrees or other educational backgrounds. In terms of income levels, the majority of respondents earned between 5,000 and 10,000 Thai baht per month (70.4%), reflecting the typical wage structure of frontline hospitality occupations in the region. Regarding professional experience, 36.5% of respondents reported more than 5 years of experience, indicating that a considerable proportion of the sample consisted of relatively experienced employees. In terms of job positions, the largest group consisted of front office staff (31.7%), followed by accounting personnel (13.0%), housekeeping staff (12.6%), and cooks or assistant cooks (10.1%). Managerial positions represented the smallest proportion of the sample (4.8%), reflecting the hierarchical structure commonly observed in hotel organizations.

The overall level of job performance competency among hotel personnel in Northern Thailand was examined using descriptive statistical analysis. The results indicate that the overall competency level was relatively high, with an overall mean score of 3.92 on a five-point Likert scale. Among the competency dimensions examined, personal traits demonstrated the highest mean score (Mean = 4.12), followed by self-concept (Mean = 4.06). These findings suggest that employees generally possess strong service-oriented attitudes and positive professional characteristics. The motivation and attitude dimension recorded a mean score of 3.84, indicating a high level of work engagement. Meanwhile, the dimensions of knowledge (Mean = 3.82) and skills (Mean = 3.79) had slightly lower mean values than the other dimensions. These results suggest that although hotel employees demonstrate strong interpersonal characteristics and positive work attitudes, there may still be opportunities for further development in technical knowledge and operational competencies.

Inferential statistical analysis was conducted to examine differences in job performance competency across demographic characteristics. Independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA were applied depending on the nature of the variables.

Table 1 ANOVA Results for Differences in Job Performance Competency

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Gender	0.48	1	0.48	1.12	.292
Age	7.94	4	1.99	4.36	.003**
Education	8.61	3	2.87	5.08	.001**
Income	3.75	2	1.87	3.11	.027*
Work Experience	11.64	3	3.88	6.72	.000**
Job Position	13.28	7	1.90	7.15	.000**

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 1 reports the results of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), which examined whether competency levels differed significantly across demographic and professional characteristics. The ANOVA results indicate statistically significant differences in competency

levels for age, education, income, work experience, and job position, while gender differences were not statistically significant. Post hoc comparisons using the LSD test were conducted to identify specific group differences, as presented in Table 2—Hypothesis Testing. The hypotheses proposed in this study were tested using inferential statistical analysis. H1: Job performance competency differs significantly by gender among hotel personnel in Northern Thailand. The results of the independent samples t-test indicated that the difference in competency levels between male and female employees was not statistically significant ($p = .292$). Therefore, H1 was not supported. This finding suggests that gender does not significantly influence job performance competency among hotel personnel in Northern Thailand. H2: Job performance competency differs significantly by age. The ANOVA results indicated significant differences in competency levels across age groups ($F = 4.36, p < .01$). Post hoc comparisons revealed that employees aged 36-40 years demonstrated significantly higher competency levels than those aged 21-25 years. Therefore, H2 was supported. H3: Job performance competency differs significantly by educational attainment. The results showed statistically significant differences in competency levels across education levels ($F = 5.08, p < .01$). Employees with an associate degree or higher demonstrated significantly higher competency levels compared with those with lower educational qualifications. Therefore, H3 was supported. H4: Job performance competency differs significantly across monthly income levels. The analysis indicated statistically significant differences in competency levels across income groups ($F = 3.11, p < .05$). Employees with higher income levels tended to report higher competency scores, suggesting that compensation and career advancement opportunities may influence employee motivation and skill development. Therefore, H4 was supported. H5: Job performance competency differs significantly by work experience. The results revealed significant differences in competency levels by work experience ($F = 6.72, p < .01$). Employees with more than five years of professional experience demonstrated significantly higher competency levels than those with less than one year or with one to three years of experience. Therefore, H5 was supported. H6: Job performance competency differs significantly by job position. The ANOVA analysis indicated statistically significant differences in competency levels across job positions ($F = 7.15, p < .01$). Therefore, H6 was supported.

Table 2 Post Hoc Pairwise Comparison (LSD)

Comparison	Mean Difference	Significance
Manager - Cook/Assistant Cook	0.72	* $p < .05$
Manager - Housekeeper	0.80	** $p < .01$
Front Office - Cook/Assistant Cook	0.75	** $p < .01$
Front Office - Housekeeper	0.83	** $p < .01$
Housekeeper - Security Staff	-0.76	* $p < .05$

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 3 Summary of Hypothesis Testing.

Hypothesis	Result
H1: Gender	Not Supported
H2: Age	Supported
H3: Education	Supported
H4: Income	Supported
H5: Work Experience	Supported
H6: Job Position	Supported

upon the quantitative findings and thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with 15 HR managers, a four-dimensional development framework is proposed. First, regarding

Knowledge and Skills, while quantitative data showed lower mean scores in these areas, qualitative insights revealed that managers attribute this to rapid technological shifts. One HR director noted that while staff excel in basic hospitality, adopting new digital property management systems remains a hurdle. Therefore, organizations must implement structured digital upskilling and scenario-based training. Second, concerning Self-Concept and Personal Traits, which scored highest quantitatively, qualitative interviews emphasized that these attributes are best sustained through experiential learning. HR managers recommended peer mentoring programs in which senior staff naturally transfer service-mindedness to new hires. Third, in addressing significant competency variations across age and experience levels, interviewees highlighted the need for tailored career pathways. Rather than generic training, younger employees require structured coaching, whereas experienced staff benefit from leadership empowerment. Finally, regarding Motivation, the qualitative data strongly linked the income-based competency disparities found in the ANOVA results to employee retention challenges. Managers stressed that intrinsic motivation must be supported by transparent, performance-based reward systems and robust motivational support to ensure long-term workforce optimization.

Conclusion and Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that hotel personnel in Northern Thailand demonstrate a generally high level of job performance competency, particularly in the dimensions of personal traits and self-concept. These dimensions are particularly important in the hospitality sector because service quality and guest satisfaction are strongly influenced by interpersonal effectiveness and emotional interaction during service encounters. The results reinforce previous research highlighting the importance of soft skills, including emotional intelligence, teamwork, and conflict management, in service-oriented industries (Baum et al., 2020; Goleman, 1995). Employees who demonstrate positive attitudes, empathy, and strong interpersonal communication skills are better equipped to deliver service experiences that meet or exceed guest expectations.

At the same time, the findings reveal significant variations in competency levels across demographic and professional characteristics, particularly age, work experience, and educational attainment. Older employees with longer professional tenure demonstrated higher levels of competency than younger employees. This finding is consistent with experiential learning theory, which suggests that practical experience and reflective learning accumulate over time, enabling individuals to refine their skills and improve job performance (Kolb, 1984). Similarly, employees with higher levels of education demonstrated stronger competencies, greater adaptability, and a clearer understanding of organizational roles. Education often enhances critical thinking, communication ability, and problem-solving skills, which are essential for addressing complex service situations in hospitality environments.

The relationship between job position, income, and competency levels also reflects broader motivational and organizational dynamics. Employees occupying higher-level positions or receiving higher compensation reported stronger competency levels. This relationship may be explained by greater access to professional development opportunities and higher levels of organizational responsibility. These findings are consistent with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which distinguishes between intrinsic motivators, such as achievement and recognition, and extrinsic factors, including salary and working conditions that influence employee performance and satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). In addition, expectancy-based perspectives suggest that employees are more motivated when they perceive a clear relationship between effort, performance, and rewards (Chiang & Jang, 2008). Together, these theoretical perspectives highlight the importance of aligning human resource development strategies with both employee aspirations and organizational objectives.

Building on these findings, the study proposes a developmental framework to strengthen workforce competencies in the hotel industry in Northern Thailand. This framework focuses on four interrelated dimensions: knowledge and skills, self-concept, personal attributes, and motivation. The development of knowledge and technical skills can be supported through targeted training programs, clearly defined performance goals, and structured mentoring systems that facilitate knowledge transfer between experienced and junior staff members. In addition, training programs should incorporate digital competencies and service technologies, which are increasingly essential in modern hotel operations.

The self-concept dimension can be strengthened through continuous performance evaluation and feedback mechanisms. Approaches such as 360-degree performance reviews, coaching systems, and leadership mentoring can help employees develop self-awareness, professional confidence, and a stronger sense of role identity. Similarly, the development of personal attributes, including professionalism, resilience, and service-mindedness, can be encouraged through collaborative work environments, interdepartmental teamwork, and reflective learning practices. Organizational cultures that emphasize transparency, accountability, and mutual respect are more likely to cultivate these attributes among employees.

The fourth dimension, motivation and work attitudes, plays a critical role in sustaining employee engagement and long-term organizational commitment. Hotels can enhance employee motivation by implementing performance-based compensation systems, flexible scheduling policies, and employee welfare initiatives. Providing accessible accommodation, wellness programs, and recognition systems may also contribute to higher levels of job satisfaction and reduced employee turnover. These strategies reflect contemporary human resource practices that integrate both financial incentives and non-monetary benefits to support workforce stability and productivity (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2020). The findings also highlight the importance of position-specific competency development programs. Front office personnel, who demonstrated relatively high levels of competency, should continue to receive advanced training in customer service management, conflict resolution, and cross-cultural communication. In contrast, housekeeping and kitchen staff, whose competencies were comparatively lower, may benefit from targeted training in operational efficiency, hygiene standards, and teamwork coordination. Managers and security personnel require leadership development and crisis management training aligned with international hospitality standards and contemporary risk management practices.

Furthermore, integrating digital technologies into hospitality operations requires ongoing training for hotel personnel. Employees must develop competencies related to property management systems (PMS), online reservation platforms, customer relationship management (CRM) systems, and data-driven service analysis. Encouraging employee participation in service innovation initiatives can also foster creativity and continuous improvement in guest experiences.

Equally important is cultivating a service-oriented organizational culture that positions hospitality employees not only as service providers but also as representatives of organizational values and local cultural identity. Team-building activities, recognition programs, and collaborative leadership practices can strengthen organizational commitment and reinforce service-oriented behaviors among employees. Drawing inspiration from hospitality management practices in countries such as Japan and several European destinations, embedding service excellence as a core professional value can enhance both employee identity and organizational reputation.

Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, several limitations and directions for future research should be acknowledged. First, the study focused exclusively on hotels in Northern Thailand, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other tourism regions or hospitality sectors. Future studies may conduct comparative research across different

tourism destinations or types of hospitality organizations. Second, the cross-sectional design of this research limits the ability to examine how competencies evolve. Longitudinal research could provide deeper insights into how employee competencies develop through experience, training programs, and organizational learning processes. Third, future research may apply advanced analytical techniques such as structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine relationships among organizational culture, leadership style, employee engagement, and competency development.

Finally, as sustainability becomes increasingly central to global tourism development, future studies should explore how environmental awareness, corporate social responsibility initiatives, and green hospitality practices influence workforce competency development. Understanding these relationships will be essential for strengthening human resource management practices and enhancing the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of the hospitality industry.

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