

Intercultural Communicative Competence of Thai Hotel Workers in Samui Island Through the Eyes of HR Professionals

ความสามารถในการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรมของพนักงานโรงแรมในอำเภอเกาะสมุย ผ่านมุมมองผู้เชี่ยวชาญด้านทรัพยากรมนุษย์

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the perspectives of human resources professionals on the nature of intercultural communicative competence and its application within the Thailand hotel industry through qualitative interviews. As human resources professionals are considered to be one of the direct practitioners in the industry, their insights and perspectives on the intercultural communicative competence of hotel workers were valuable for the current study. The subjects included eight human resources professionals purposively selected from upscale hotels in Samui island. Two research questions were posed: “What constitutes intercultural communicative competence according to human resources professionals?,” and “To what extent do Thai hotel workers currently possess intercultural communicative competence according to human resources professionals?” Results revealed that the components of intercultural communicative competence from a human resources perspective were grouped under five core categories including attitude, cultural empathy, experience, interaction involvement, and personal attributes. In regard to the extent of intercultural communicative competence of Thai hotel workers who worked in the line level and management level positions, the majority of interviewees described their level of intercultural communicative competence as being ‘relatively good’ and ‘better than relatively good,’ respectively. Other relevant headings in the Thailand hotel industry from a human resources perspective were also discussed.

Keywords: Intercultural Communicative Competence, human resources development, workplace diversity

บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษามุมมองของผู้เชี่ยวชาญด้านทรัพยากรมนุษย์ที่มีต่อความสามารถในการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรมของพนักงานโรงแรมในอำเภอเกาะสมุย โดยใช้การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกตามระเบียบวิธีวิจัย

เชิงคุณภาพ เนื่องจากผู้เชี่ยวชาญด้านทรัพยากรมนุษย์ถือเป็นหนึ่งในผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสียโดยตรงในอุตสาหกรรมบริการ ข้อมูลเชิงลึกและมุ่งมองต่างๆ จึงควรค่าแก่การศึกษา งานวิจัยนี้ใช้วิธีการเลือกกลุ่มตัวอย่างแบบเจาะจงตามเกณฑ์ที่กำหนด (Purposive Sampling) ผู้เชี่ยวชาญด้านทรัพยากรมนุษย์จำนวน 8 คนได้รับการคัดเลือกจากโรงเรียนระดับสูง ใน ambito เกาะสมุย คำถามวิจัยหลักมี 2 ข้อได้แก่ องค์ประกอบหลักของความสามารถในการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม คืออะไร และพนักงานโรงเรียนในปัจจุบันมีความสามารถในการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรมอยู่ในระดับใดในมุมมองของผู้เชี่ยวชาญด้านทรัพยากรมนุษย์ ผลการศึกษาพบว่าองค์ประกอบหลักของความสามารถในการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม จากมุมมองของผู้เชี่ยวชาญด้านทรัพยากรมนุษย์จัดอันเป็น 5 องค์ประกอบ ได้แก่ ทัศนคติ ความสามารถในการเข้าใจ ความรู้สึกของผู้ที่มาจากการวัฒนธรรมอื่น ประสบการณ์ การมีปฏิสัมพันธ์และความเกี่ยวข้องกับบุคคลที่มาจากการวัฒนธรรม อื่น และคุณลักษณะส่วนบุคคล นอกจากนี้ยังมีการอภิปรายประเด็นอื่นๆ ที่เกี่ยวข้องกับอุตสาหกรรมโรงเรียนผ่านมุมมอง ของผู้เชี่ยวชาญด้านทรัพยากรมนุษย์ในงานวิจัยนี้

คำสำคัญ: ความสามารถในการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม, การพัฒนาทรัพยากรมนุษย์, ความหลากหลายของบุคลากร ในองค์กร



Introduction

Intercultural communicative competence refers to “a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (Fantini, 2007, p.9) The concept of intercultural communicative competence has gained attention from several researchers for decades. It was historically developed from research focusing on Western expatriates and their cultural adjustment in the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s (Sinicrope et al., 2007) In the late 1970s and 1980s, the intercultural competence research expanded to broader contexts including international business, cross-cultural training, and internationalization of education (Sinicrope et al., 2007) In the hospitality and tourism context, past research has alternatively applied the concept of intercultural communicative competence to three primary approaches to interactions between people from different cultural backgrounds including visitors and the host community, visitors and the local

workforce in the industry, and among the workforce from different cultures (Blanton, 1981; Cohen & Cooper, 1986; Kriegl, 2000; Lam & Singh, 2018; Pimapunsri, 2008; and Sharifi-Tehrani et al., 2019).

While interactions between visitors and members of the host community were usually regarded as brief and superficial, those between visitors and local workforce in the industry represented more for occupational purposes (Cohen & Cooper, 1986) It can especially be seen in the hotel sector where its workers must serve and satisfy the needs of guests, as well as interact with colleagues from different cultures. As the hospitality and tourism industry grows, Thailand, especially its tourist destination such as Samui island must strive to retain its international competitiveness with a supply of internationally and interculturally competent workers. It has been suggested that the presence of a diverse workforce can help companies to understand cultural differences and better serve customers in various markets (Pimapunsri, 2008).

This study is part of a larger research project entitled “Intercultural Communicative Competence of Thai Hotel Workers: A Study of Upscale Hotels in Samui Island” where a mixed methods approach and two separate studies were conducted with two main stakeholders in the industry. While in another study self-assessment surveys were conducted with 514 Thai hotel workers who represent an output of hospitality and tourism training and educational programs offered in Thailand for investigating factors influencing Thai hotel workers’ intercultural communicative competence, qualitative interviews were utilized to explore the perspectives of human resources professionals in this study. As human resources professionals are considered to be one of the direct practitioners in the industry, their insights and perspectives on the intercultural communicative competence of hotel workers are valuable for the current study. In addition, findings from this study will be valuable for both private and public hospitality and tourism sectors in Thailand.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of human resources professionals on the nature of intercultural communicative competence and its application within the hotel industry through qualitative interviews.

Literature review

In the hospitality and tourism context, the concept of ICC was examined in the research of Blanton (1981); Cohen & Cooper (1986); Kriegl (2000); Lam & Singh (2018); Pimapunpri (2008); and Sharifi-Tehrani et al. (2019). The nature of the hospitality and tourism industry necessitates the interactions of visitors and employees in the industry both directly and indirectly, thus highlighting

the importance of communication among people from different cultural backgrounds. According to Blanton (1981), there is a greater demand in the hospitality and tourism industry for intercultural understanding and communicative competence in relation to other occupations. As Lam and Singh (2018) also pointed out, the hostel staff serves as an embassy for guests and host community to culturally interact with one another.

Apart from interactions with visitors, employees in the hospitality and tourism industry also interact with colleagues from different cultures. Most past research has pointed out that many hotel companies try to make an effort to address the diversity issue for three main reasons: demographic changes, globalization, and marketing. Since the workforce is increasingly more diverse, the need for companies to reflect demographic changes is of vital importance. Over the years, many hotel companies have realized that multiple benefits of workplace diversity such as competitive advantage, effective knowledge transfer, and effective productivity can be achieved by managing diversity wisely. Diversity in the workforce can help companies to develop their capability of understanding customers’ needs and engaging in long-term business relations with them. A diverse collection of skills and experiences such as language and cultural understanding allows a company to provide quality service to guests on a global level. Kriegl (2000) also pointed out that the ability to communicate with foreign guests along with cultural sensitivity is an asset to international hospitality workers.

Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005) conducted qualitative interviews with participants who had interactions with people from different cultures on a regular basis. Five variables emerging from the results of word cluster analysis in the Arasaratnam

and Doerfel's (2005) study included empathy, motivation, attitude towards other cultures, experiences, and listening. From the results of the previous study, Arasaratnam (2006) employed quantitative survey research method and path analysis to investigate the relationships among five constructs (cultural empathy, motivation, attitude towards other cultures, experience, and interaction involvement) associated with an individual's intercultural communicative competence.

This study expanded the scope of intercultural communicative competence research to a broader context. While Arasaratnam (2006)

mainly discussed undergraduate students from different nationalities, the current study focused on the perspectives of human resources professionals in the Thailand hotel industry. Specific research questions for the current study were as follows:

1. What constitutes intercultural communicative competence according to human resources professionals?
2. To what extent do Thai hotel workers currently possess intercultural communicative competence according to human resources professionals?

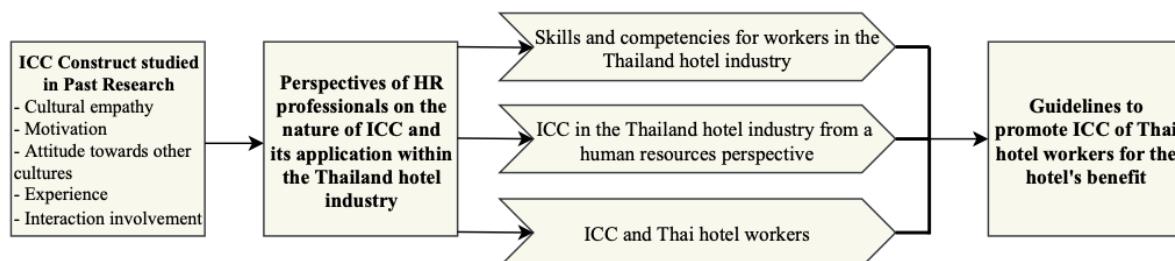


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Research

Research Methodology

This study was qualitative-based. In-depth interview was utilized to explore the perspectives of human resources professionals from upscale hotels in Samui island on the nature of intercultural communicative competence and its application within the hotel industry.

Population and Sample

As in many other parts of the country, hotel ownership in Samui island is divided into two main groups: independent hotels and chain hotels under both local and international management. Listed by TripAdvisor (2018) there were 11 key local hotel companies in Samui including Aspira Hospitality, B2 Hotels, Cape & Kantary Hotels, Centara Hotels & Resorts, Im

perial Hotels & Resorts, Muang Samui Group, Sala Hospitality Group, Sawasdee & Woraburi Group, Siam Hotels & Resorts, The Erawan Group, and TCC Hotels Group. In line with the local hotel companies, the following eight international hotel companies also play a significant role in Samui island: Accor, Best Western International, Hilton Hotels Corp., InterContinental Hotels Group, Marriott International, Melia Hotels International, Minor International, and Onyx Hospitality Group.

In this study, purposive sampling was applied to select participants who could represent and reflect the perspectives of human resources professionals within the following criteria: (a) interview eight subjects (out of 11 local chain hotels and eight international chain hotels in Samui island), (b) participants must primarily be

human resources or training managers or any higher position in human resources professionals, (c) participants must be from four- and five-star hotels in Samui island, (d) four out of eight participants must be representative from the international chain hotel, and (e) four out of eight participants must be representative from the local chain hotel. Participants who meet the imperative criteria were contacted via telephone for participation in the study. Then, the appointment confirmation email and the interview script were delivered to each participant prior to the interview. Interviews were conducted in the individual offices of the human resources professionals or the hotel lobby area/hotel restaurant as participants saw fit.

Research Tools

The interview script produced for this study comprised four sections of open-ended questions: (a) opening questions, (b) introductory questions, (c) key questions, and (d) ending questions. Two opening questions were asked to obtain demographic and organizational information. Three introductory questions were then followed to introduce the participants to the concept of skills and competencies needed for hotel workers and intercultural work settings as the foundation for the key questions such as “What do you consider to be the key component of intercultural communicative competence?,” “How do these following components promote intercultural communicative competence and help employees in the Thailand hospitality and tourism industry?,” and “To what extent do you think Thai hotel workers currently possess intercultural communicative competence?”

Data Collection

Data were collected through qualitative interviews with human resources professionals. The interviews were audio recorded and each interview comprised 14 questions. While the shortest interview was conducted 26.20 minutes, the longest interview was 58.52 minutes. In essence, the average length of interview was 43.92 minutes per person. Given the fact that most of the participants utilized Thai language for daily communication, the interviews were directed in Thai language for the convenience of expressing thoughts and remarks with respect to the intercultural communicative competence of hotel workers and its significance from a human resources point of view. As data became saturated and no new repeating ideas or findings emerged at the end of the eighth interviews, the recruitment of additional participants was thus not required in this study.

Statistical Analysis

The data analytical method was adapted from Auerbach and Silverstein's (2003) guidelines consisting of five steps: (a) select the relevant text for further content analysis, (b) develop main headings based on open-ended questions in the interview script, (c) group together repeating ideas and relevant statements shared by the participants, (d) group repeating ideas into coherent categories under each main heading, and (e) describe and interpret the meaning of repeating ideas and coherent categories under each main heading.

As a parallel term to the validity in quantitative research, trustworthiness was a major concern in the current study. In an attempt to contribute to trustworthiness, thick description which refers to the process of describing the

interview data in extensive detail was applied (Creswell & Miller, 2000). With a detailed description of human resources professionals' perspectives on the nature of intercultural communicative competence and its application within the Thailand hotel industry, the readers can easily follow and make a connection between findings from the current study and their own point of view. As Creswell and Miller (2000) pointed out, thick description also allows readers to understand that the findings from the study are credible and can be applied to other settings or similar contexts. Overall, three main themes have been emerged from the interview data which were addressed further in results and discussion section of the current study as follows:

1. Skills and competencies for workers in the Thailand hotel industry
2. ICC in the Thailand hotel industry from

a human resources perspective

3. ICC and Thai hotel workers

Results and Discussion

Sample Characteristics

Of the eight Thai human resources professionals who accepted the invitation to participate in the study, three were males, and five were females. In regard to current job position, one was human resources manager, two were human resources & training manager, three were training manager or alternatively called, learning and development manager, and two were human resources director. The average length of time the interviewees had worked in the current hotel, in the hotel industry, and in human resources professionals was 9 years and 7 months ($M = 9.66$), 16 years and 6 months ($M = 16.63$), and 14 years and 3 months ($M = 14.31$), respectively (Table 1).

Table 1

Sample Characteristics by Gender, Job Position, and Work Experience (N = 8)

Trait	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	3	37.5
Female	5	62.5
Position		
Human Resources Manager	1	12.5
Human Resources & Training Manager	2	25.0
Training Manager (Learning & Development Manager)	3	37.5
Human Resources Director	2	25.0
Years in the current hotel		
	<i>Mean</i>	9.66
Years in the hotel industry		
	<i>Mean</i>	16.63
Years in the human resources profession		
	<i>Mean</i>	14.31

Organizational Characteristics

Among the eight interviewees, four were representative from a local chain hotel, and another four were from an international chain hotel as part of purposive sampling criteria. The average number of permanent employees working in the participants' hotels was 260 employees ($M = 260.00$), and eight expatriate employees ($M = 8.50$). The ratio of expatriates to Thai employees was 3:100. The nationalities of expatriates were reported varying from American, Australian, Burmese, Chinese, European, and Korean. A majority of expatriates worked in management level positions including general manager, executive chef, supervisor, director or higher position in any department.

In regard to percentage of Thai hotel workers with a degree in hospitality and tourism, an estimated 25% of Thai hotel workers were reported having this degree (Table 2). This finding was consistent with the study by Chaisawat (2005) which indicated that the hospitality and tourism education in Thailand was scarcely existent until a decade ago. According to Chaisawat (2005) the major boom in Thai hospitality and tourism programs had been during 1999 to 2003. The total number of academic institutions offering an undergraduate degree in hospitality and tourism increased 51% from 51 in 1999 to 77 in 2003 (Chaisawat, 2005) As a result, Thai employees who had mostly worked in the industry more than ten years tend to graduate in other fields of study.

Table 2

Organizational Profile of Thai Human Resources Professionals in Samui Island (N = 8)

Trait	Frequency	Percent
Hotel ownership		
Local chain	4	50.0
International chain	4	50.0
No. of permanent employees	<i>Mean</i>	260.00
No. of expatriate employees	<i>Mean</i>	8.50
Ratio of expatriates to Thai employees	<i>Mean</i>	3:100
Percentage of Thai hotel workers with a degree in Hospitality/Tourism		
	<i>Mean</i>	25.00

Skills and Competencies for Workers in the Thailand Hotel Industry

As part of introductory questions, all participants were asked to discuss the skills and competencies which are essential for workers in the Thailand hotel industry. The majority (7 interviewees; 87.5%) listed top three ranked skills and competencies that they believed are

required for workers in line level and management level positions. As represented in Figure 2, five (62.5%) out of eight interviewees agreed that language and communication skills should be ranked number one followed by functional and technical skills with respect to the skills and competencies needed for line-level workers. As one participant clarified, “functional and tech

tical skills are trainable during both on-the-job and off-the-job training, whereas language and communication skills take longer time for training and developing those who do not possess this competency from the beginning" (HR#6). Due to the fact that the number of Chinese tourists has consistently outpaced visitors from other

countries for the past decade, among the foreign languages besides English, Chinese language was most mentioned during the interviews. The majority (6 interviewees; 75%) added that those who are able to speak or communicate in Chinese would be first considered for employment in the hotel industry, especially in Samui island these days.

Top 3 Skills for Line-level Hotel Workers (N = 8)

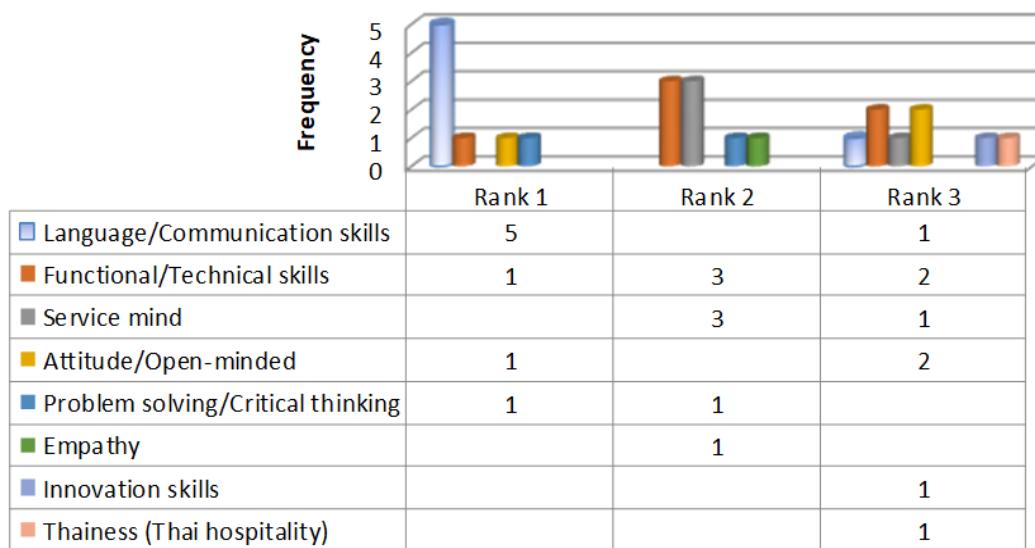


Figure 2 Top Three Skills for Line-level Hotel Workers (N = 8)

The six following skills and competencies were also perceived to be important for line-level employees: (a) service mind, (b) attitude/open-minded, (c) problem solving/critical thinking, (d) empathy, (e) innovation skills, and (f) Thainess (Thai hospitality). This finding was consistent with past research which pointed out that these skills and competencies play an essential role for the success in the hospitality industry (Annaraud, 2006; Baum, 2002; Blue & Harun, 2003; Christou, 2000; Kay & Moncarz, 2004; Kiatkiri, 2014; Lertwannawit et al., 2009; Martin & Davies, 2006). As can be seen in general hotel job postings, people who work in the hotel are expected to have service mind along with other qualifications. Half of the

participants (4 interviewees; 50%) agreed that those who possess service mind tend to have service skills or the ability to appropriately and effectively provide good service and satisfy the needs of hotel guests.

Innovation skills and Thainess were also mentioned and emerged as key skills and competencies for line-level employees in the current study. The younger generation with a good knowledge of IT or e-commerce applications, such as online ticketing and reservation service, are in high demand nowadays. One participant added that she included this competency in the job requirements and qualifications when recruiting new line-level staff (HR#4).

Top 3 Skills for Management-level Hotel Workers (N = 8)

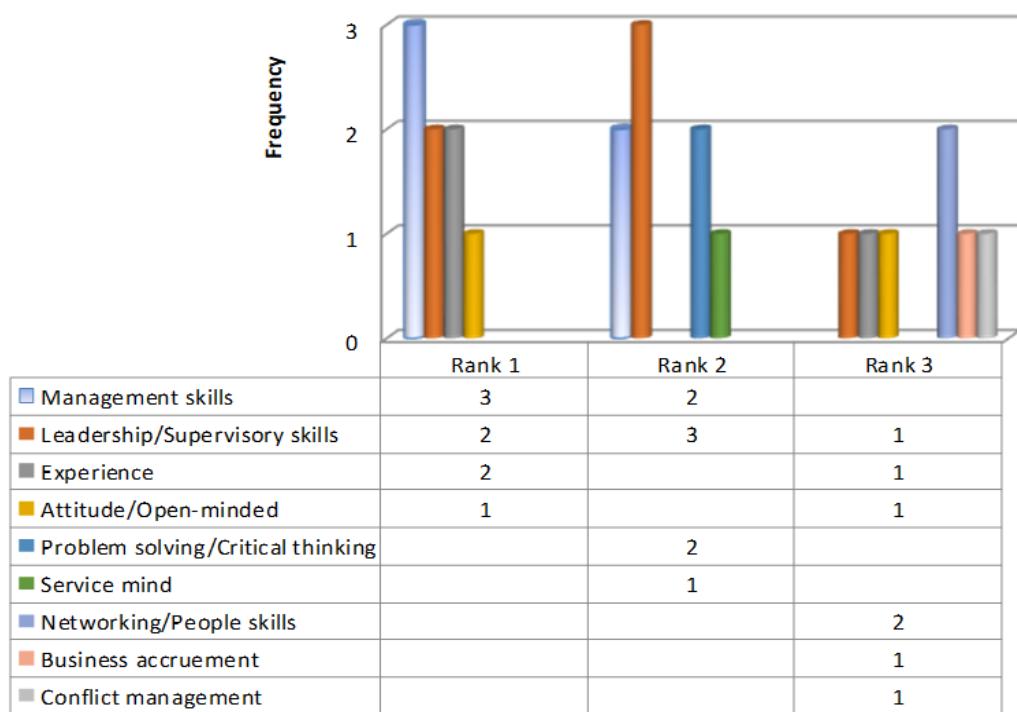


Figure 3 Top Three Skills for Management-level Hotel Workers (N = 8)

Last but not least, Thainess which refers to the traditional hospitable character of the Thai people was also emerged as one of the competencies for line-level employees in the current study. The concept of Thainess was initiatively launched in the “2007 Seven Amazing Wonders of Thailand” campaign by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) to promote the characteristics of Thai attractions (TAT, 2018). With the intention of making the nation stand out by offering one of a kind of experiences to tourists visiting Thailand, the concept of Thainess also covers the unique art of Thai living which refers to traditional Thai hospitality, lifestyle, and friendliness of the people. Hotel workers who possess the unique art of Thainess would impress guests with the hospitable character of the Thai people and the numerous cultural assets of the nation and make Thailand a unique and memorable tourist destination.

In regard to the skills and competencies needed for workers in management level positions, management skills were rated by five (62.5%) out of eight interviewees as the most important competencies followed by leadership and supervisory skills (Figure 3). The majority (6 interviewees; 75%) pointed out that management and leadership skills are an absolute requirement for people who work in management and higher-level positions. As they have already passed all requirements of basic skills and competencies, skills for those who work in management level positions such as management and leadership skills are expected to be far more advanced than for those in line level positions. In other words, they need to be able to lead and motivate their subordinates to achieve desired performance and organizational objectives under their supervision effectively.

Management and leadership skills should

always come together with strategic thinking, planning skills, supervisory, and visionary skills or the ability to forecast what the world or the business should be like in the future. The seven following skills and competencies were also perceived to be essential for workers in management level positions: (a) experience/professionalism, (b) attitude/open-minded, (c) problem solving/critical thinking, (d) service mind, (e) networking/people skills, (f) business acumen, and (g) conflict management.

Two participants (25%) also pointed out that networking and people skills are important for those who work in management level positions. They must have positive work relationships with colleagues, their subordinates, and good networking with people outside their organization. In other words, management level workers can be viewed as an ambassador for the property who builds cooperative relationships with people both from inside and outside their organization. This finding was in part consistent with results from the study by Kiatkiri (2014) where networking and people skills were ranked number five of skills and competencies needed for Thai hotel workers in management level positions.

ICC in the Thailand Hotel Industry from a Human Resources Perspective

Attitude. When asked about what constitutes intercultural communicative competence, all interviewees agreed that attitude towards other cultures is the key component of this competence. They believed that attitude towards other cultures serves as a foundation of hotel workers' intercultural communicative competence which then leads to service quality. This finding was consistent with the study by Jhaiyanuntana and Nomnian (2020) sta-

ting that attitude is the primary element, which comprises curiosity, open-minded, and willingness to accept other cultures and beliefs. Attitude can also generate the self-development of intercultural knowledge and competence for an appropriate and effective intercultural interaction (Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020) Attitude is not only grounds for hotel workers' intercultural communicative competence, but also for their job performance. If they fundamentally have a positive attitude, there followed other components.

Cultural empathy. From a hospitality service perspective, cultural empathy was viewed as an attempt to understand other cultures empathically as well as the ability to foresee a guest's needs and concerns. As in part consistent with the study by Kiatkiri (2014) half of the interviewees (4 interviewees; 50%) brought up that cultural empathy is in the nature of the Thai people who in general have an empathic comprehension of other cultures. With their thoughtfulness and considerate regard for others, Thai people habitually like to extend a warm welcome to the passing tourists regardless of nationality. Thus, traditional Thai hospitality is known for its kind and hospitable service. In addition, one participant added that:

“People do not have cultural empathy by nature, they need a profound understanding of other cultures and experience in intercultural involvement in order to build up this ability. That is, cultural empathy can promote an individual's intercultural communicative competence, but it is not easy for anyone to possess this ability” (HR#8).

Given that cultures are by nature a very sensitive matter, lacking deep understanding of other cultures might risk offending some people. Thus, a profound comprehension of other cultures,

particularly the culture of target hotel guests, is needed in the context of customer service in the hospitality industry.

Experience. Work experience in intercultural environment thus emerged as another vital component of hotel workers' intercultural communicative competence. Four interviewees (50%) observed that front-line employees who had worked in the hotel industry for many years tend to be at ease when interacting with hotel guests from different cultures. On the other hand, new employees, especially those who just graduated from school and have no work experience, are likely to get nervous when they have to serve international hotel guests. Subsequently, intercultural experience in actual work settings and training program in intercultural communication provided by the hotel in which they were employed appeared to be important for workers in the industry. Past research has consistently revealed that a range of intercultural experience such as being members of international schools, becoming part of multi-ethnic institutions, and having extensive contact with people from different cultural backgrounds can enhance an individual's intercultural communicative competence (Gannon, 2008; Straffon, 2003; Zhai & Scheer, 2004).

Interaction involvement. All interviewees agreed that hotel workers' intercultural communicative competence is also underpinned by their knowledge of other cultures. To appropriately and effectively interact with hotel guests and colleagues from different cultures, hotel workers need to have practical knowledge of other cultures, the basic knowledge of hotel guests' culture, specifically cultural Dos and Don'ts. For example, as one interviewee added, "The increasing number of Israeli tourists in Samui island each year has made hotel workers pro-

gressively aware of the nature of the Jewish culture and their beliefs, including the specific dietary or kosher meals, and other restrictions imposed by religious law" (HR#8).

Aside from knowledge of other cultures, Thai hotel workers' intercultural communicative competence was also supported by their language abilities, and confidence to interact with people from other cultures. As Inkaew (2016) also pointed out, attitudes, cultural knowledge, and English skills are significantly important for the workforce in the industry, especially for hotel front office staff who have to interact with guests from different cultural backgrounds on a regular basis.

Personal attributes. Consistent with the study by Kiatkiri (2014), personal attributes emerged as one of the components of intercultural communicative competence. In the current study, be trainable, be self-disciplined, and be mature were described as personal attributes that a hotel worker should possess. As one interviewee pointed out, "Hotel workers' educational background does not really matter in the hospitality and tourism context, as long as they are potentially trainable. For those who are trainable, they could be trained to deal with intercultural encounters in actual work settings and develop a sense of diversity, cultural awareness, and many more abilities in the future" (HR#2).

During the interviews, be self-disciplined or having the ability to make themselves do the things they know they ought to do without others making them do, and be mature, were also mentioned and perceived as another two required personal attributes of a hotel worker in the cultural context. In other words, a self-disciplined hotel worker with a sense of mature and appropriate tends to behave in a sensible and reasonable way even he/she disagrees on any

cultural issues; he/she still focuses and makes an effort to stay on task which is certainly helpful for the service performance.

In summary, the components of intercultural communicative competence from a human resources perspective were grouped under five core categories including attitude, cultural

empathy, experience, interaction involvement, and personal attributes. All core categories were guided by Arasaratnam's (2006) study except personal attributes which emerged as another component of hotel workers' intercultural communicative competence in the current study (Figure 4).

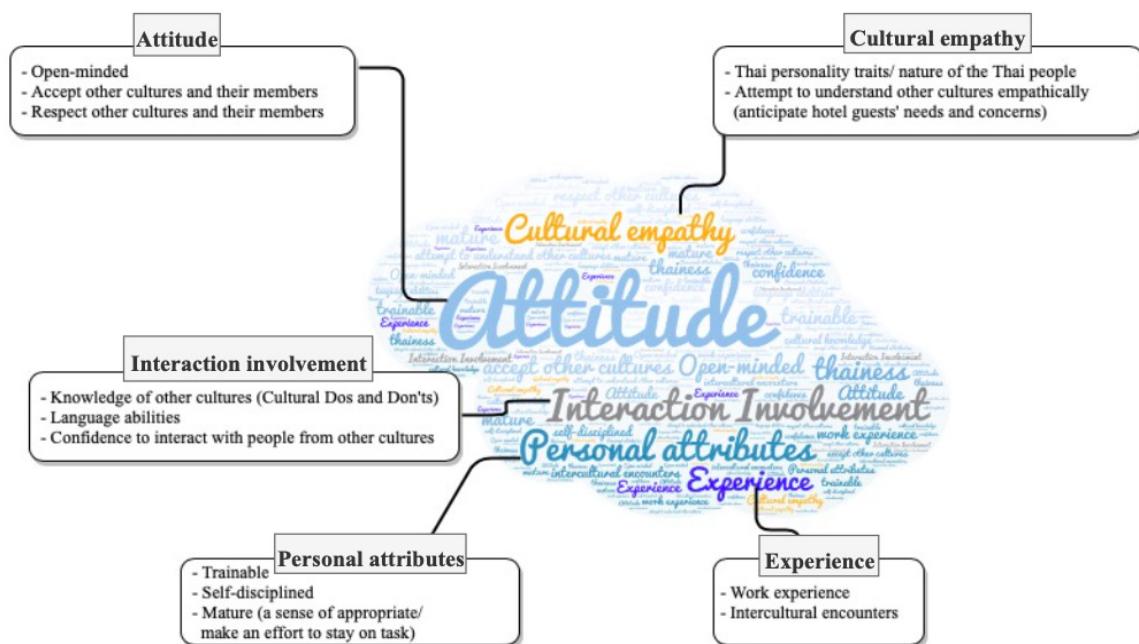


Figure 4 Components of ICC in the Hospitality Industry from a Human Resources Perspective

ICC and Thai Hotel Workers

All respondents were also asked to respond to two comparative questions about the extent of intercultural communicative competence of Thai hotel workers who worked in line level and management level positions. Five (62.5%) out of eight interviewees rated their employees in line level positions an estimated ICC score of 80% up. Although it also depends on the degree of interactions with hotel guests and colleagues from diverse backgrounds, the level of Thai hotel workers' intercultural communicative competence was described as being 'relatively good' in general. The majority of interviewees claimed that their employees in line level positions were

able to serve hotel guests from different cultures appropriately and effectively. Thus, they had never received a guest complaint of cultural offenses.

In regard to Thai hotel workers in management level positions and their intercultural communicative competence, all interviewees reflected that the level of their intercultural communicative competence must be higher than of those who worked in line level positions. Given that workers in management level positions should be able to solve any intercultural communication problems that may arise and help their subordinates to get through the situation, the level of their intercultural communicative competence was thus described as being 'better

than relatively good' in general.

Recommendation

Given that the hospitality industry is increasingly competitive, Thailand must strive to retain its international competitiveness with a supply of internationally and interculturally competent workers. It is thus undeniable that intercultural communicative competence can help both the hotel worker and the hotel industry improve service quality. Managers should consider how to promote Thai hotel workers' intercultural communicative competence for the hotel's benefit.

At present, many hotels in Thailand, either managed by an international, local hotel chain, or independent without any affiliation are aware of this fact and have provided training programs starting from the workers' first day of employment. In most cases, cultural awareness training programs were included as part of orientation program for familiarizing new employees with their job responsibilities, the work environment, their department's relationship to other departments, and the target customers/hotel guests they have to interact with, etc.

From a human resources perspective in this study, Thai educators should play a part in

instilling a sense of intercultural understanding and competence into their students in order to prepare them for an intercultural community and globalization. The cooperation between the industry and relevant stakeholders should also be implemented for human resources development in the context of regional, international, and global competitiveness. For example, Thai educators can cooperate with TAT (the Tourism Authority of Thailand) and Department of Tourism Standards Development on a program to educate students and graduates about intercultural understanding by pinpointing the cultures of the top five international tourist arrivals to Samui island who represent as the primary market. With this type of cultural awareness program, students and graduates can learn and know how to deal with people from these cultures before starting their work in the industry. In addition, this study may serve as a gateway for future research related to intercultural communicative competence of the Thai workforce and human resources development in other operating sectors of the hospitality and tourism industry including food services, attractions, events, travel trade, and transportation services.



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