

## Competency Development of the Hotel Staff in Koh Samui, Surat Thani Province

Nisarath Thaitong<sup>1</sup> Chuleewan Praneetham<sup>2</sup> Matthew Noades<sup>3</sup>  
and Prasert Sitthijirapat<sup>4</sup>

### Abstract

The purposes of the research were: 1) to develop the competencies of the hotel staff in Koh Samui, Surat Thani Province, 2) to compare the competencies of the hotel staff before and after training, and 3) to survey the satisfaction of the participants with the training course. The sample subjects of the study were fifty hotel staff in Koh Samui selected by purposive random sampling. The research instruments were 1) a training course, 2) pre-test and post-test, 3) a 5-point rating scale questionnaire, and 4) an open-ended questionnaire. The statistics used were the percentage, frequency, mean, standard deviation, and t-test was used for hypothesis testing.

The findings revealed that: 1) the training helped to enhance the personnel' competencies on service mind, cross-cultural competency, human relations, team work, personality / emotion control and problem-solving., 2) the hotel staff's post-test scores were higher than the pre-test scores with statistical significance at the .01 level., and 3) the participants confirmed that they were satisfied with the training program and gained more knowledge, competencies, and skills. Improving employees' competencies is necessary and could improve the performance, job, and satisfaction of organization. Therefore, education and training for enhancing career and development of competencies should be

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<sup>1</sup>International School of Tourism, Suratthani Rajabhat University, Thailand

<sup>2</sup> International School of Tourism, Suratthani Rajabhat University, Thailand

<sup>3</sup>International School of Tourism, Suratthani Rajabhat University, Thailand

<sup>4</sup>Faculty of Business Administration, Sripatum University, Thailand

provided to hotel staff and the personnel in the tourism and service industries in order to improve organization development and gain competitive advantage.

**Keywords:** competencies development, hotel staff, Koh Samui

## Introduction

Human resources play an important role in an organization. They act as one of the most important resources for efficiency and successful management of organizations (Vathanophas and Thai-ngam, 2007; Chansirisira, 2012). Importantly, the 11<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development Plan of Thailand, focuses on the human resource development, which aims to improve the quality of Thai residents and society, as well as the human resource competencies. Employees are the driving force behind organizational success. Competencies and skills of employees are one of the main factors to achieve the organization's goal. Therefore, developing human resource competencies will help organizations sustain development and become a recognized global leading organization. Competency refers to abilities, skills (Shariff et al., 2014), knowledge, traits, and behaviors (Vathanophas and Thai-

ngam, 2007). Knowledge is a basic acquirement of an individual that can be gained through experience, education or training. Knowledge is important in the career market in terms of building and improving individuals productivity (Kandampully, 2002).

The tourism and service industries have grown rapidly in many countries around the world. Hotel business is one of the major areas directly related to the tourism and service industries. Tourism has resulted in the growth of service business in both direct and indirect sectors. The change of the world situation in the era of globalization, facilities, and modern technology competition make the service more efficient in order to provide good service to the customers. Competitive advantage can lead to a world-class organization, while service excellence can maximize customer satisfaction, which is the heart of the hotel business. Both Thai and foreign

tourists travel continuously in Thailand. Investment continues to increase. It also helps to expand the opportunities for career, service, and business to many Thai people. Thus, the government of Thailand has the policy to support and promote tourism both inside and outside the country. The government focuses on corporate development, management systems, strengthening the personal skills, and marketing capabilities to become an efficient driving force in operation and international competitiveness. The quality of goods and services must be standardized. The economy of the country has stepped in "Service Economic" (Sricharoenpramong, 2013).

Koh Samui is one of the most well-known islands in southern Thailand. The island is one of the famous tourist attractions because it has beautiful natural resources and landscape. Each year many tourists come to visit the island. In year 2017, there are 2,511,617 tourist arrivals in Samui Island (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2017). There are more than 400 hotels and resorts in Samui Island (Tourism Authority of Thailand, Samui

office Center, 2011). In fact, the accommodation business is the main business on the Island since there are varieties in types and prices of accommodation business. Especially, Samui is one of the famous destinations in the world for tourists who seek for luxury hotels and resorts. Tourists can easily find the different world class chain-hotels on the Island such as Four Seasons Resort Koh Samui, W Koh Samui, Sheraton Samui Resort, The Riz Carlton Koh Samui, The InterContinental Samui Bann Taling Ngam Resort, Conrad Hotel, The Six Senses Koh Samui, Renaissance Koh Samui Resort and Spa, and Le Meridien Koh Samui Resort and Spa. Thus, skilled personnel and service staff are necessary for the tourism and service industries in Koh Samui. Front line staff can be considered as the heart of service delivery. Hotel staff are important human resources for service as they are a link between service users and service providers. Service personnel can impress tourists with their service quality which including their good appearances, their knowledge and skills, their responsiveness, their trustworthiness,

and their empathies. Hence, the success of the businesses is crucially relying on the quality of services from the service personnel. Development of the efficiency of employees in the hotel business to be knowledgeable, skillful, devoted to service, to be attentive to the work and the accomplishment of the hotel staff is important in providing a good quality service.

According to the Cambridge dictionary, competency is defined as “an important skill that is needed to do a job” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018). Therefore, the competencies of front office staff can be defined as the important skills that needed for the front office staffs. Competencies can vary between different organizations, industries, and levels of job positions within the organizations such as the entry level positions and the management positions of the organization. The core competencies for front office staffs are including; work effectively with customers and colleagues, work in a socially diverse environment, implement occupational health and safety procedures, perform clerical procedures, access and

retrieve computer-based data, communicate effectively on the telephone, maintain hospitality industry knowledge, promote products and services to customers, perform basic first aid procedure, perform child protection duties relevant to the tourism industry, establish and maintain a safe and secure workplace, speak English at a basic operational level, and use common business tools and technology (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2013). The functional competencies are including; receive and process reservations, operate a computerized reservation system, provide accommodation services, maintain guests' financial records, process a financial sale transaction, conduct a night audit, provide bell boy / porter services, operate a (PABX) switchboard, receive and place in-coming phone calls, facilitate out-going phone calls, provide information about in-house services, and provide international (IDD) service information (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2013). However, the majority can be found and grouped in various types of industries and organizations.

Koenigsfeld et al. (2012) studied about developing a competency model. Many organizations use a competency model and/or competency framework and it referred to the importance of Sandwith's five domain competency models. These are defined as a descriptive tool that an organization needs knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors to operate effectively. Establishing human resources competency and capability can lead an organization to its strategic goal (Hu, 2010). Developing human resource competencies and capabilities can lead an organization to achieve its strategic goal. Core competencies of the hotel staff are skills that employees need to carry out their work effectively. The hotel staff should have human relations, cross-cultural competency, personality and emotion control, service mind, teamwork and responsibility, technical skills, communication, leadership, and problem-solving as their core competencies. Increasing the productivity of the hotel business and maintaining the quality and effectiveness of hotel staff are important to the business because

performance efficiency of employees will lead to the success of the business and individuals.

On-nom (2016) stated that the quality of human resources is an important factor in determining the growth and opportunities of the organization. However, an organization has faced many problems of human resources such as knowledge, personnel capability, a negative attitude towards the organization, and lack of work skills. Human resource development is therefore essential for the tourism and service industries in order to give employees a sense of customer service, be more patient in their service, and serve as many customers as possible as customer needs. Education and training can provide the hotel staff with new knowledge and skills of career competencies. It is obvious that new ideas, knowledge, skills, experience, appropriate attitude and performance of personnel can be developed by a systematic learning system.

Customers are important for the hotel business and tourism and service industries. Kandampully (2002) claimed that he customers have the

different perspectives and needs of various products and services from providers. Hotel businesses are expected to serve the customers with creativity and quality of service. Quality of service is the main factor that helps to build competitiveness. Excellent services of the hotel personnel, that impress and serve the needs of customers are the heart of the hotel business, tourism and hospitality industries. Baum (2002) asserts that service providers could quickly recognize customer satisfaction and learn how to improve services and impress the customers. However, some employees are lack of the service skills, they do not care for the customers as they should. Additionally, they are lack of the patience and enthusiasm for their work. Hence, the development of employees in the hotel business plays an important role. Therefore, competencies and skills of the hotel staff are needed to be developed for the excellent hotel services.

### **The Purposes of the Research**

1. To develop the

competencies of the hotel staff in Koh Samui, Surat Thani Province.

2. To compare the competencies of the hotel staff before and after training.

3. To survey the satisfaction of the participants with the training course.

### **Research Methodology**

1. Population and Sample

The population in this study was hotel staff in Koh Samui, Surat Thani province, Thailand. The samples in this study were fifty employees of hotels business in Koh Samui. The purposive sampling technique was employed for the research.

2. Instruments

The research instruments were 1) a training course, 2) pre-test and post-test, 3) a 5-point rating scale questionnaire, and 4) an open-ended questionnaire. The close-ended questionnaire used a ranking scale of 1-5 (1 = very poor/not satisfied, 2 = poor/somewhat satisfied, 3 = okay/mostly satisfied, 4 = good/satisfied, 5 = excellent/very satisfied). The content and structural validity were determined by Item

Objective Congruent (IOC) with 3 experts. The reliability test of the whole questionnaire was 0.75.

3. Data Collection

Action research was employed for the study. The training course for hotel staff’s competencies development consisted of six modules: 1) introduction and human relations, 2) cross-cultural competency, 3) personality and emotion control, 4) service mind, 5) team work, and 6) problem-solving skills. These six modules were assessed and recommended by

specialists and the committees of hotel and tourism association in Koh Samui for improving performance competencies of the personnel.

4. Data Analysis

The mean, frequency, percentage, standard deviation, and t-test were used to analyze the data.

**Results of the Study**

The analysis results of the competencies development of personnel in the tourism and service industries can be shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Competencies Development of hotel staff

Topic for competencies development	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Meaning
1. Human relations	4.64	0.65	Very good
2. Cross-cultural competency	4.70	0.68	Very good
3. Personality and emotion control	4.52	0.51	Very good
4. Service mind	4.72	0.64	Very good
5. Team work	4.62	0.58	Very good
6. Problem-solving	4.46	0.50	Good
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.61</b>	<b>0.59</b>	<b>Very good</b>

Table 1 shows that the overall competency of the participants after attending the training course was at a

very high level ( $\bar{x} = 4.61$ , S.D. = .59). The top five competencies of the

participants were service mind ( $\bar{x} = 4.72$ , S.D. =.64), cross-cultural competency ( $\bar{x} = 4.70$ , S.D. =.68), human relations ( $\bar{x} = 4.64$ , S.D. =.65), team work ( $\bar{x} = 4.62$ , S.D. =.58), and personality and emotional control ( $\bar{x} = 4.52$ , S.D.=.51) respectively. One high rated competency of the participants was problem-solving ( $\bar{x} = 4.46$ , S.D. = .50).

Table 2: Knowledge and Skills Achievement of Pre-test and Post-test of Hotel Staff

Experimental group	Number	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	t-value	p-value
Pre-test Knowledge	50	3.26	0.63	17.83	.000**
Post-test Knowledge	50	4.40	0.50		
Pre-test Skills	50	3.30	0.71	18.20	.000**
Post-test Skills	50	4.42	0.50		

Notes. \*\*Significant Level at .01

Table 2 indicates that the average score of the participants for knowledge and skills was significantly higher than that of the pre-test score at the .01 level.

Table 3: Satisfaction towards the Training

Satisfaction towards the Training	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Meaning
1. Modules and contents were useful and effective.	4.46	0.50	Good
2. Qualification of the trainers.	4.74	0.44	Very good
3. Location for training course.	4.40	0.61	Good
4. Duration of training course.	4.24	0.72	Good
5. Knowledge gained from training program	4.68	0.47	Very good
6. Skill development	4.54	0.54	Very good

Satisfaction towards the Training	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Meaning
7. Competencies development	4.64	0.49	Very good
8. Training program met expectations.	4.74	0.44	Very good
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.56</b>	<b>0.53</b>	<b>Very good</b>

Table 3 shows that the overall satisfaction of the hotel staff with the training course of the competency development was at a high level ( $\bar{x} = 4.56$ , S.D. = .53). The expectation of the participants for the training program was at a high level ( $\bar{x} = 4.74$ , S.D. = .44) and the qualification of the trainers was at a high level ( $\bar{x} = 4.74$ , S.D. = .44). The knowledge and skills of the hotel staff after training were at a high level ( $\bar{x} = 4.68$ , S.D. = .47 and  $\bar{x} = 4.54$ , S.D. = .54 respectively). Meanwhile, modules and contents ( $\bar{x} = 4.46$ , S.D. = .50), location for the training course (Mean = 4.40), and duration of the training course ( $\bar{x} = 4.24$ , S.D. = .72) were found at good levels.

### Discussion and Conclusions

The results revealed that all six modules and contents were relevant, practical, and very useful to their job. The acquired additional knowledge and skills gained from the training program can be applied to their work. The training led to strengthening the relationship between employees. Moreover, most of the personnel realized that the training program could develop and improve their core competencies. Chansirisira (2012) points out that every employee at all levels is essential to the organization. Tesone and Ricci (2012) state that working staff are the main human resource of the organization. Core competencies are important factors affecting the performance efficiency of employees and competitive abilities of the organization. Each employee should have an opportunity for self-

development. Hence, the organization should discover how to improve performance efficiency of the staff in order to help the organization to succeed and to achieve the goal of the organization and individual.

The findings revealed that the average post-test scores of the participants for knowledge and skills were significantly higher than those of the pre-test scores at the .01 level. The hotel staff have improved their competencies in service mind, cross-cultural competency, human relations, team work, personality and emotion control, and problem-solving after the training program, which is accorded to the Bussaman et al. (2013)'s research who found that the core competencies of personnel were enhanced through the designed training system. Vathanophas and Thaingam (2007) mentioned that an effective process to develop each personnel's competencies is training. While, Baum (2002) stated that more than 100 years, the public (schools, colleges, universities, training boards) and private sectors in many countries have invested to develop the

education and training for hospitality in terms of skills development to meet the needs of various stakeholders.

The study showed that the overall satisfaction of the respondents with the training course/program was at a high level. They were very satisfied with the trainers who were very experienced, helpful, productive, and professional. Teaching and learning method was designed systematically. The participants had the chance to share ideas and experiences in their work. Group discussion and role-play helped them to understand and find the solutions for problems that they faced at their work. On-nom (2016) states that human resource development through training is a process for developing and encouraging knowledge, understanding, skills of human resource in the workplace, and improving positive attitude and behavior for better performance.

## Recommendations

The study suggests that appropriate education can build, enhance, and develop essential

competencies of each personnel. The human resource development process of the service sectors should focus on training knowledge, and skills, including improving positive attitudes toward their work. Human resource should be developed continuously. Thus, the study recommends that proper education or training programs should be provided to develop their core competencies of all staff members for to efficient work perform and achieve their personal objectives and organization's goals. Employees in the organization should meet new situations with self-improvement and exchange experiences with colleagues. The organization should provide employees the opportunity to participate in activities or projects held by the government or private

organizations. Moreover, employees of all levels must be trained to have the knowledge and skills to meet the standards of service and the international standards because the impression of the customers is the most important in the operation of tourism and service industries. However, the problems and obstacles in the human resource development process in the service sector are to coordinate with outside organizations, knowledge training requires specialized knowledge, the readiness of participants, and a collaborative attitude towards development.

The further study is to study factors that enhance the competencies and performance of the hotel staff, such as quality of service or happiness in work.

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