

A Competency Model For Entry-Level Hotel Practitioners

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Abstract

The study investigated the competency gap between the current “is now” level of competency and the expected “should be” level of competency of new entrants to the Philippine hotel industry to provide a benchmark of competencies and skills for a competency model for an ideal entry-level hotel practitioner. Through a survey, a total of 241 hotel respondents rated the current and the desired levels of competencies and skills of incoming hotel practitioners. The survey yielded a preliminary list of competencies and skills, referred to as interim competency model. The designed model was validated through a face-to-face interview with human resource managers of the respondent hotels. The t-test revealed significant differences between the current and the desired levels of competencies and skills of new entrants to the hotel industry. The same finding was yielded when respondents were grouped according to their selected demographic profiles such as age, educational attainment, gender and hotel location. The ANOVA also revealed significant differences among the competencies and skills when respondents were grouped according to their departments.

Keywords: competency gap, entry-level hotel practitioner, competency model, benchmarking

The hospitality industry faces significant difficulties; among these are: a shortage of employees, high employee turnover, skill insufficiency and competency gaps (Jeou-Shyan et al., 2011). The Philippine government has intensified its drive to solve the gap between the actual skills of employees and the skills that employers expect. The high unemployment and underemployment problem in the country has been attributed to the job-skill mismatch in the Philippine employment environment.

It is a problem seen in both the private and public sectors. This study presented the perspective of the hotel industry in the problem of skills and job mismatch. The mismatch, however, cannot be wholly attributed to the ineffectiveness of the educational and training system. Rather, the mismatch is caused and compounded by the fact that relevant and timely information as regards the skills needed by the hotel industry is not readily available to the educational and training institutions. Educational and training institutions have focused instead on developing management staff, hence the increase in management courses.

The growth of hospitality programs worldwide has resulted in wide variations in program structures, curricular offerings, and course content. These prompted researchers to examine essential competencies and industry needs for informed program restructuring (Ruetzler et al., 2014).

To create and maintain a competitive advantage for the organization, the hotel industry today has adopted approaches to drive, assess, and reward the desired behavior, one of which is to examine competencies for a job. This study built on the work of the previous research investigations that identified not only the essential competencies required by managers but also the specific competencies useful in managing at a particular level (entry-level) or within specific functional areas, namely: Front Office, Housekeeping, and Food and Beverage departments.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

One of the earlier major hospitality management competency studies was done by Tas (1988) in which six of the most important competencies for hotel general-manager trainees were identified. Seventy-five (75) hotel managers were given questionnaires and the

results revealed six competencies deemed essential for hotel-manager trainees centered on human relation skills: 1) managing guest problems; 2) maintaining professional and ethical standards; 3) demonstrating professional appearance and poise; 4) communicating effectively both in writing and speaking; 5) developing positive customer relations; and 6) positive working relationship with employees. Hogan (1989) also surveyed 77 hotel managers in Tennessee to determine the kind of graduates the industry would hire. The hotel operators were interested in hiring graduates only in three employment areas – marketing and sales, food and beverage, and housekeeping management, which constituted the types of entry-level and middle-management positions regional hotels were interested in filling from the ranks of college graduates. Second in rank were in the areas of people skills, human relations and service while specialties such as engineering, computers, and finance were the areas considered last.

Hammersley and Tynon (1998) identified a common core of competencies of an ideal entry-level recreation professional of resort and commercial recreation businesses. They also determined the feasibility of a national certification program. Entry-level job descriptions used by 89 Resort and Commercial Recreation Association Organizations were collected and analyzed using job task through a computerized content analysis program resulting in the identification of 103 entry-level job requirements or qualifications. The three rounds of Delphi technique employed resulted in the classification of the entry-level job requirements/qualifications into 9 job task categories and 52 specific job competencies associated with each category. The final job task categories ranked according to importance for entry-level job performance were: 1) communication skills; 2) leadership; 3) guest services; 4) programming; 5) supervision; 6) regulations, rules and standards; 7) promotion and publicity; 8) maintenance; and 9) retail operation.

In a longitudinal study, North and Worth (1998) identified and reported changes in three out of the five workplace competencies that define effective job performance identified by the first SCANS, 1991 report. The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills report by the U.S. Department of Labor (1991) is made up of five competencies combined with a three-part foundation of skills and personal qualities that define the skills required to enter employment. The study on entry-level technology, interpersonal and basic skills

related to communication was undertaken to address two needs: a) to provide entry-level employment information for today's changing, competitive workplace; and b) to determine if the workplace continues over time to seek the skills and preparation that the authors of 1991 SCANS report advocated. A total of 1,800 entry-level classified newspaper advertisements from 10 standard metropolitan statistical areas in the U.S. were analyzed on the basis of key terms and descriptions in the 1991 SCANS report for technology, interpersonal and basic skills related to communication, in order to determine whether these competencies and basic skills were included.

The study showed that today's workplace continues to seek technology skills as reflected among three fourths of entry-level classified advertisements. It also showed a decline in classified ads that included interpersonal and basic skills related to communication. These skills could be expected from the applicants, but listing them in entry-level ads may not have been necessary. An industry-specific study was carried out by Harrison (1996) using the SCANS competency framework focusing on the workplace basic competencies needed by entry-level and middle-management employees as perceived by hotel/motel managers for ascertaining the importance of the skills and competencies defined by SCANS and determining demographic information of the hotel/motel managers. The survey method with a purposive sample of 232 respondents in the hotel/motel industry throughout the state of Missouri was utilized. Respondents rated the importance of the workplace basic competencies needed by their entry-level and middle-management employees using the five competency domains: 1) interpersonal skills; 2) information skills; 3) resource management skills; 4) system skills; and 5) technological skills. A significant difference exists between the mean scores of the importance ratings of the competencies needed by entry-level employees and the middle-management employees. The importance of the competencies was perceived higher for middle-managers than for entry-level employees in all the five domains. A significant difference exists between the mean scores of importance ratings of the competencies when respondents were classified by years of management experience. Less-experienced managers (1-10 years) rated all five domains higher in importance than the more experienced managers (11-40 years). Interpersonal or "soft" skills also received the highest ratings from employers for entry-level and middle-management

employees.

In response to a labor crisis, The Bureau of Business and Economic Research labor market survey was conducted for the Memphis Area Chamber of Commerce, Tennessee Department of Employment Security to determine what employers think about the current labor force and what could be improved (Buchner, 1999). It focused on the attributes of entry-level workers involving 120 companies from 11 industry types. Employers agreed that the top three most important attributes of prospective entry-level employees were: 1) having a good attitude, 2) being drug-free; and 3) having no criminal record. Employers cited the lack of skills and poor work ethic or poor attitude as among the most severe weaknesses of job applicants over the past three years. Employers' rating on the importance of employee skills with the most impact on productivity on the job showed that a very large percentage of the potential and actual applicant pool were ill-prepared for the world of work; there were shortfalls in terms of language skills (oral and written), quantitative ability, problem solving, interpersonal skills, and basic work orientation. The Memphis labor pool (1998-1999) had very poor basic skills. The work habits of entry-level workers were a huge concern across all industry types. Communication skills and appearance were so poor that 90% of the applicants were not considered.

Another hospitality management competency study was done by Chung-Herrera, Enz, and Lankau (2003) with the goal of developing a future-oriented hospitality leadership competency model for the lodging industry. Using different competency studies as bases, a preliminary behavioral competency model with 99 competencies that captured the most important dimensions of leadership behavior across several industries was constructed and faxed to 137 senior-level industry executives at various hotel companies. From the respondents' feedback, a final competency model was drafted consisting of eight key competencies such as: 1) self- management; 2) strategic positioning; 3) implementation skill; 4) critical thinking; 5) communication; 6) interpersonal skill; 7) leadership; and 8) industry knowledge together with 28 behavioral dimensions. Competency in self-management was rated highest while industry knowledge was rated lowest. The relatively low score in knowledge suggests that the importance for industry leaders of specific expertise is decreasing because industry expertise can be acquired by an adept leader, while flexibility in a

changing business environment is hard to learn and often inherent in an individual's personality and skill set. Behavioral dimensions that appear as core attributes of future leaders are ethics, awareness of customers' needs, time management, speaking with impact, and commitment to quality and team orientation. The study also showed that acquiring hotel industry expertise is not as important in a future-oriented competencies model in favor of manager's ethical behavior and strategic-management acumen.

Workplace competencies are also the concern of the education and academic sector, hence educational and training institutions should prepare graduates for workplace readiness. Rainsbury, Hodges, Burchell and Lay (2002) identified 24 competencies students and graduates perceived to be important for business graduates entering the workplace. They were also able to identify differences in ranking of competencies between students and graduates and ascertain whether students and graduates perceive hard skills to be more important than soft skills. Hard skills are associated with technical aspects of performing a job while soft skills (affective) refer to interpersonal or behavioral skills and emphasize personal behavior and managing relationships among people. These skills are regarded by many authors as complementary because successful individual performance requires both skills. Students and graduates rated computer literacy, customer service orientation, teamwork and cooperation, self-confidence, and willingness to learn as the five most important, whereas defectiveness, organizational awareness, developing others, and impact and influence on others were rated least. Willingness to learn was perceived to be most important because to be a valuable employee, one must be willing to learn new skills to keep pace with the rapidly changing workplace. The graduates perceived hard and soft skills more importantly than the students did. Individual perceptions of the importance of competencies are not static; they change as the individual progresses from tertiary studies into the workplace.

Chan and Coleman (2004) examined the skills and competencies needed for the Hong Kong hotel industry from the perspective of the hotel human resource manager at the beginning of the 21st century. The questionnaire and telephone interviews were used to gather data from 75 hotels in which 10 hotel human resource managers were invited. Based on their work experience, the human resource managers rated 18 skills and competencies according to importance for fresh

graduate employees. Having a professional attitude and being honest in the job were rated as most important. Being able to communicate in a foreign language was also important. Practical knowledge was not given a very high ranking. Supervisory skills were also considered as unimportant for a new employee. Being able to lead others effectively had the lowest rank. The employers did not expect the employees to define and solve problems on their own, as they perceived that new employees were inexperienced in this area of competency.

Overall, HR managers were not looking for higher-level managerial skills. On the basis of the interviews, the HR managers expressed that though practical skills are important, a positive attitude is the first priority that employers look for in the new graduates, not to mention commitment to work which is also important. One out of ten hotel managers interviewed mentioned the importance of educational qualifications. Educational background was not a major criterion for success in the hotel industry, especially in Hong Kong. In the past, most entry-level positions in the hospitality industry in Hong Kong put emphasis on the employee's job-related experience rather than academic qualifications. Although everyone believes in the importance of education and information technology in running a business, the hotel industry in Hong Kong still moves very slowly in recognizing this as regards employing potential managers.

Weber, Finley, Crawford, and Rivera (2009) did an exploratory study identifying the soft skill competencies in entry-level hospitality management positions. Among the soft skills were: leadership/people/relationship skills; communication management/organization; and cognitive and knowledge skills. The competencies with the highest means involved working effectively with employees and customers, setting a positive example, displaying honesty/commitment, and developing creative solutions to problems.

Jeou-Shyan et al. (2011), identified 25 top managers' competencies in the Taiwanese industry perceived to be most critical for career development. Results divided the required competencies into generic and technical dimensions. The top three most important competency domains were leadership, crisis management, and problem-solving.

Competency studies have been done for various reasons. A study conducted by Li, Peir-Yuan Patrick and Wang, Fu-Jin (2010) explored the core competencies of the industry's first-level supervisors. The

output of the study was the creation of an evaluation model for use in promotion and selection. Similarly, Diaz-Fernandez, Lopez-Cabrales, and Valle-Cabrera (2013) did a study linking employees' competencies with the creation of a skill-based compensation system.

Wide variations in program structures, curricular offerings and course content have been brought about by the rapid growth of hospitality programs worldwide, all of which have prompted researchers to examine essential competencies and industry needs. Ruetzler and colleagues (2014) explored how important various technical skill sets are perceived by students, faculty, and industry professionals today. Seven (7) key technical skills were identified: academic performance (grade point average), social networking, time management, strategic planning skills, spreadsheet acumen, and written and oral communication skills. Students placed heaviest emphasis on GPA, social networking skills, time management and oral communications skills; on the other hand, the faculty and the professionals perceived oral communication skills to be the most important technical skills required for successful management in the hospitality industry.

Overall, the literature reviewed indicated that competency assessment is a prerequisite to performance improvement or effectiveness. As can be noted, the studies also show varied, reliable, and valid methodologies to be used in a competency and skills assessment.

In view of the above studies, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: There is a significant difference between the current and the desired state of competency of entry-level hotel practitioners.
- H2: There is a significant difference between the current and the desired competencies and skills of new entrants when respondents were grouped according to their age, gender, position, tenure, educational attainment, and hotel location.
- H3: There is a significant difference between the current and the desired level of competency of new entrants to the hotel industry when respondents were grouped according to their department.

Method

The study aimed to identify and describe the current and the desired level of the competencies and skills of new entrants to the hotel industry and determine the competency gap and use it in developing a benchmark of competencies and skills as basis for a competency model for an ideal entry-level hotel practitioner in the Philippines. Twelve (12) accredited deluxe hotels in the National Capital Region participated (DOT 2003, 2004). Deluxe hotels offer luxurious, state-of-the-art facilities, modern, technologically-advanced and comprehensive services to cater to the whims and comfort of the most discerning guests. As such, deluxe hotels cater to the top of the line clientele such as dignitaries and ambassadors, businessmen, the “rich and famous” who are very sophisticated and demanding. In turn, staff requirements in these hotels may be more stringent than their lower class counterparts. Table 1 shows the profile of the participants of the study.

Table 1 *Profile of Respondents*

Key Departments	Frequency	Percent
Key Departments	Frequency	Percent
Food and Beverage	74	30.7%
Human Resource	61	25.3%
Front Office	70	29.0%
Housekeeping	36	14.9%
Total	241	100.0%

The steps undertaken in the development of a competency model were as follows:

Step 1 involved perusal of related literature and studies. Different competency studies such as the SCANS Competency Framework (1991, 2000) and that of Evers, Rush and Berdrow (1998) were used as starting point to come up with a list of the competencies, skills, abilities and personal qualities essential to entry-level employees in the hotel industry.

Industry-specific competencies such as those of ANTA (2000), TESDA (2003), and the TIBFI (2004) were added to capture the uniqueness of the hotel jobs. The questionnaire was subjected to a reliability analysis and it showed high alpha level (0.9734).

Step 2 required data gathering from the perspective of hotel managers and their staff on the current and the desired level of competency of the target group using a 5-point Likert scale where: 5-exemplary, 4-proficient, 3-nearing proficiency, 2-novice, 1-not applicable/ have not observed/don't know. A total of 241 hotel respondents rated the current and the desired level of competencies and skills of the target group.

Step 3 involved examining the data collected from the survey to identify relevant competencies. Differences between the current and the desired levels of competency were identified to determine the competency gap utilizing t-test and ANOVA.

Step 4 involved ranking according to importance of the eight clusters of competencies and skills that new entrants must possess to function at an effective level in the workplace. This is referred to as an interim competency model.

Step 5 constituted the validation of the interim model through a one-on-one interview with selected human resource managers of the respondent hotels, thus testing the accuracy and relevance of the interim model. Through the quantitative data from the survey and the qualitative data from the interview, the model was refined. This final test determined if the competency model had strong face validity (Cheetham & Chivers, 1998).

Findings and Discussion

New Entrants' Competencies and Skills (IS NOW)

The target group was rated to be proficient in their personal qualities such as being trustworthy, courteous, honest, willing to learn new things, professional in appearance and poise, punctual, flexible, service-oriented, responsible and self-confident. The new entrants were also found to be proficient in their interpersonal skills, specifically in their ability to build friendship, to adjust and relate well to people of varied backgrounds, and to be team players who contribute to group efforts. Similarly, the new entrants were found

to be proficient in their ability to listen. The findings gave insights into the strengths and weaknesses of new entrants and reinforced the study of Anderson (2002) where skills identified as most important were generic workplace skills. These were attendance, honesty, positive attitude, carries share of work, punctuality, works well with co-workers, and follows intent of oral directions and instructions. In the study, many of the employees were deficient in the skills required for entry-level employment. Furthermore, the study was guided by the document entitled 21st Century Skills for the 21st Century Jobs as cited by Paulson (2001) where attitudes and personal characteristics such as: 1) honesty, 2) integrity, 3) good work ethics, 4) flexibility, 5) responsibility, and 6) ability to self-manage were summarized as desirable workplace skills. Tourism employers need people who can demonstrate positive attitudes and behavior, responsibility and adaptability. They need people who can think and show willingness to learn and people who can work and communicate with others. The target group was, however, found to be just nearing proficiency in their current communication, problem-solving, decision-making, planning and organizing, leadership and influence, and technical skills, thus the target group has inadequate competencies and skills in these six areas of competency. Table 2 shows the mean distribution and verbal interpretation of the overall "IS NOW" state of competencies and skills of new entrants.

Table 2 *"IS NOW" State of Competencies & Skills of New Entrants*

Competencies & Skills	Mean	Interpretation
Communication Skills	3.41	Nearing Proficiency
Problem Solving Skills	3.17	Nearing Proficiency
Decision Making Skills	3.13	Nearing Proficiency
Interpersonal Skills	3.51	Proficient
Planning & Organizing Skills	3.31	Nearing Proficiency
Leadership & Influence Skills	3.26	Nearing Proficiency
Technical Skills	3.14	Nearing Proficiency
Personal Qualities	3.72	Proficient

New Entrants' Competencies and Skills (SHOULD BE)

The top 15 competencies and skills that the target group was expected to have are as follows: 1) trustworthy; 2) punctual; 3) courteous; 4) willing to learn; 5) honest; 6) responsible; 7) service-oriented; 8) professional appearance and poise; 9) flexible/multi-skilled; 10) confident; 11) friendly; 12) knowledgeable in the hotel business; 13) team player; 14) a good example to others; and 15) a good listener. The findings gave information on what the hotel industry expects of a new entrant to function effectively in the workplace and provide information on the ideal level of competency that should be possessed by those wanting to work in the hotel industry in the Philippines. These top competencies and skills described by the respondents refer to the soft skills. The hotel respondents put premium on soft skills over and above hard skills.

The findings are also congruent with the findings of Chan and Coleman (2004) who reported that human resource managers in Hong Kong agreed that having a professional attitude, being honest, being a team player, being responsible, and having a genuine desire to help people top the list of skills and competencies most important to newly graduated employees. However, the manager respondents did not give a very high ranking for practical knowledge. They also agreed that leadership skills and problem-solving skills were not expected of new employees as they perceived them to be inexperienced in this area of competency; thus, they gave new employees the lowest ranking in this area. The findings seem to reinforce the idea that the respondent hotels no longer focus only on technical abilities. A complete picture is needed to determine whether someone is right for the job or doing it well (Cook & Bernthal, 2004). The new entrants are expected to be proficient in the seven identified competencies and skills namely: 1) communication; 2) problem-solving; 3) decision-making; 4) interpersonal; 5) planning and organizing; 6) leadership and influence; and 7) technical skills but are expected to be exemplary in their personal qualities. Table 3 presents the mean distribution and verbal interpretation of the overall "SHOULD BE" state of competencies and skills of new entrants.

Table 3 “*SHOULD BE*” State of Competencies & Skills of New Entrants

Competencies & Skills	Mean	Interpretation
Communication Skills	4.41	Proficient
Problem Solving Skills	4.34	Proficient
Decision Making Skills	4.35	Proficient
Interpersonal Skills	4.47	Proficient
Planning & Organizing Skills	4.45	Proficient
Leadership & Influence Skills	4.39	Proficient
Technical Skills	4.17	Proficient
Personal Qualities	4.71	Exemplary

The Competency Gap

A comparison of the current and desired states of competencies and skills also shows that the target group was indeed deficient in all areas of competencies and skills. This connotes that the target group has fallen short of what the industry practitioners expect of an incoming hotel employee. The t-test revealed a significant difference between the current and the desired levels of competency of the new entrants. The computed t-value of all the eight clusters of competencies and skills is greater than the critical t-value of -1.96. The difference between the actual and the expected competencies of new entrants is the competency gap where the mismatch exists. The findings show that of the eight clusters of competencies, decision-making skills ($sd=0.92$ and a mean difference of -1.22) had the biggest gap. This was followed by problem-solving skills ($sd=0.84$ and a mean difference of 1.17). Higher decision-making skills and problem-solving skills are required more than the actual skills possessed by the new entrants. The smallest difference was in interpersonal skills and personal qualities ($sd=0.79$ and mean differences of -0.97 and -0.98) respectively. The new entrants' actual skills in these areas were close to standard requirements. Table 4 depicts the mean distribution, standard deviation, t-value and P-value of the competency gap.

Table 4 *The Competency Gap*

Competencies & Skills	Mean	Std. Deviation	Computed t -value	Sig.(2- tailed) p-value
Communication Skills	-1.00	0.83	-18.6	0.000 *
Problem solving Skills	-1.17	0.84	-21.6	0.000 *
Decision Making Skills	-1.22	0.92	-20.7	0.000 *
Interpersonal Skills	-0.97	0.79	-19.0	0.000 *
Planning & Organizing Skills	-1.14	0.85	-20.8	0.000 *
Leadership & Influence Skills	-1.13	0.83	-21.2	0.000 *
Technical skills	-0.91	0.81	-11.3	0.000 *
Personal Qualities	-0.98	0.79	-19.3	0.000 *

* (<.05) significant

Ranking of Competencies and Skills when Respondents were grouped according to their Demographic Profile.

The t-test revealed a significant difference in the rating of the new entrants when respondents were grouped according to their age, educational attainment, gender, and hotel location. The older age group (30 years old and above) rated the target group lower in their current interpersonal skills than the younger age group (20-29 years old) but thought that the new entrants were insufficient in their actual interpersonal skills. They rated the new entrants higher in their desired personal qualities than the younger age group. Overall, the older age group had higher expectations of the new entrants in their personal qualities than the younger age group. Table 5 shows the findings in tabular form.

Table 5 *T-test result on significant differences when respondents were grouped according to their gender*

Competencies & Skills	Male	Female
Interpersonal Skills “SHOULD BE”	4.37 Proficient	4.57 Exemplary
Planning & Organizing Skills “SHOULD BE”	4.32 Proficient	4.58 Exemplary
Leadership & Influence “SHOULD BE”	4.28 Proficient	4.49 Proficient

Competencies & Skills	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Result
Interpersonal Skills “SHOULD BE”	-2.666	0.008 *	significant
Planning & Organizing Skills	-3.186	0.002 *	significant
Leadership & Influence Skills “SHOULD BE”	-2.487	0.014 *	significant

* (<.05) significant

Respondents with lower educational attainment (college undergraduate) rated the target group lower in their required level of competency as regards their planning and organizing skills. They also rated the new entrants lower in their required level of competency as regards their personal qualities (Table 6). The lower rating compared to their graduate counterparts may be attributed to the fact that they have not earned their degrees yet; thus, they had lower expectations.

Table 6. *T-test result on significant differences when respondents were grouped according to their educational attainment*

Competencies & Skills	College Graduates Mean	College Undergraduates Mean
Planning & Organizing Skills “SHOULD BE”	4.51 Exemplary	4.33 Proficient
Personal Qualities “SHOULD BE”	4.43 Proficient	4.35 Proficient

Competencies & Skills	t-value	Sig (2-tailed)	Result
Planning and Organizing Skills “SHOULD BE”	-2.923	0.004 *	Significant
Personal Qualities “SHOULD BE”	-2.083	0.038 *	Significant

* (<.05) significant

Female respondents had higher expectations than males as regards the new entrants' interpersonal skills, planning and organizing skills, and leadership and influence skills (Table 7). Incoming female employees are usually assigned to jobs requiring guest contact hence the need for higher competencies in the said skills.

Table 7. *T-test result on significant differences when respondents were grouped according to their gender*

Competencies & Skills	Male	Female
Interpersonal Skills "SHOULD BE"	4.37 Proficient	4.57 Exemplary
Planning & Organizing Skills "SHOULD BE"	4.32 Proficient	4.58 Exemplary
Leadership & Influence "SHOULD BE"	4.28 Proficient	4.49 Proficient

Competencies & Skills	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Result
Interpersonal Skills "SHOULD BE"	-2.666	0.008 *	significant
Planning & Organizing Skills "SHOULD BE"	-3.186	0.002 *	significant
Leadership & Influence Skills "SHOULD BE"	-2.487	0.014 *	significant

* (<.05) significant

Bay area hotel respondents rated the new entrants' current level of technical skills higher than the commercial area hotel respondents, signifying that the former may have been hired on the basis of their possession of these competencies and skills (Table 8). Bay area hotel respondents rated the new entrants higher in their desired technical skills than their commercial area hotel counterparts signifying that the former had higher expectations of the technical skills of new entrants compared to their commercial area hotel respondents' counterparts. Contrary to the general observation, they may have more stringent requirements in as far as the technical skills of the new entrants were concerned. They may also have had a greater need for skilled incoming hotel employees.

Table 8. *T-test result on significant differences when respondents were grouped according to hotel location*

Competencies & Skills	Commercial Area Hotels	Bay Area Hotels
Technical Skills “IS NOW”	3.04 Nearing Proficiency	3.26 Nearing Proficiency
Technical Skills “SHOULD BE”	4.03 Proficient	4.34 Proficient

Competencies & Skills	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Result
Technical Skills “IS NOW”	2.08	0.038 *	significant
Technical Skills “SHOULD BE”	3.304	0.001 *	significant

* (<.05) significant

Ranking of Competencies and Skills when Respondents were Grouped by their Department

The ANOVA revealed a significant difference in the rating of new entrants when respondents were grouped according to their departments. The Human Resource (HR) department respondents rated the new entrants higher than the Housekeeping department respondents in their ability as team player and in their ability to contribute to group efforts (p=0.039) – a dimension of interpersonal skills. The HR respondents had higher expectations of the target group than the Housekeeping respondents.

The Housekeeping department respondents rated the new entrants higher than the Food and Beverage (F&B) (p=0.027) and Front Office (FO) (p=0.022) respondents in as far as their ability to demonstrate basic working knowledge of housekeeping operations is concerned. The Housekeeping respondents had higher expectations than their F&B and FO counterparts. The departments’ main task is to ensure that the main product of the hotel (guest rooms) is ready for sale. Their main responsibility is to clean and prepare guest rooms and to maintain the cleanliness of the hotel common areas such as the lobby entry, main rest rooms, foyer, meeting and pre-function areas. The department must determine what rooms are to be cleaned, and which are available or occupied.

The F&B respondents ($p=0.007$) rated the new entrants highest when compared with the FO ($p=0.029$) and the HR respondents in their ability to demonstrate basic working knowledge of the hotel business, its objectives, its products and services – a dimension of technical skills. The F&B respondents had the highest expectations of the new entrants. The F&B service employees in particular were expected to possess the competency since they acted as salespersons of the hotel. They must be familiar with specialties and offerings and hours of operations of restaurants outlets, so they can recommend these to hotel guests. The F&B respondents also rated the new entrants higher ($p=0.000$) than the front office respondents in terms of their working knowledge of food sanitation and safety – also a dimension of technical skills. The F&B respondents' had higher expectations of the new entrants than the FO respondents. Both the F&B production and service employees handle highly perishable goods, thus food sanitation and safety is a must. Findings are shown in table 9.

The F&B department respondents rated the target group the highest compared with their front office ($p=0.000$) and housekeeping ($p=0.033$) counterparts with regard to the target groups' ability to demonstrate basic working knowledge of dining room service and operations, bar and beverage operations, hot kitchen production and operations, and cold kitchen production and operations. These are all dimensions of technical skills and are competencies and skills expected of F&B personnel since these are their main tasks. The F&B respondents had higher expectations of the new entrants' technical skills. Several respondents reasoned that experience was required even for new entrants in the food and beverage production department. At the very least, an on- the-job training was necessary. A lower rating was reported by the FO respondents for technical skills. Many tasks in the FO department could be learned while on the job. The lower rating reported by the F&B respondents for the ability to demonstrate basic working knowledge of pastry production and operations may have been due, however, to the small sample size from the pastry area.

Table 9. ANOVA result on significant differences when respondents were grouped according to their departments

Competencies & Skills "SHOULD BE"	Department	Department	Sig. p-value
Interpersonal Skills: A team player & contributes to group effort	HR Department 4.69 Exemplary	Housekeeping 4.28 Proficient	0.039
Technical Skills: Demonstrates basic knowledge of the hotel business, its objectives, its products & services	HR Department 4.34 Proficient	Front Office 4.64 Exemplary Food & Beverage 4.69 Exemplary	0.029 0.007
Technical Skills: Working knowledge of food sanitation & safety	Food & Beverage 4.66 Exemplary	Front Office 3.83 Proficient	0.000
Technical Skills: Demonstrates basic working knowledge of housekeeping operations	Housekeeping 4.47 Proficient	Food & Beverage 3.84 Proficient Front Office 3.81 Proficient	0.027 0.022
Technical Skills: Demonstrates basic working knowledge of dining room service operations	Front Office 3.60 Proficient	Housekeeping 4.47 Proficient Food & Beverage 4.49 Proficient	0.033 0.000
Technical Skills: Demonstrates basic working knowledge of bar and beverage operations	Front Office 3.53 Proficient	Food & Beverage 4.39 Proficient	0.000
Technical Skills: Demonstrates basic working knowledge of hot kitchen production & operations	Front Office 3.40 Proficient	Food & Beverage 4.30 Proficient	0.000

* (<.05) significant

The FO respondents ($p=0.027$) rated the target group higher than the Housekeeping respondents in their current ability to understand diverse views and show sensitivity to individual differences – a component of interpersonal skills – and in their current ability to demonstrate basic working knowledge of guest reservations ($p=0.025$). The FO respondents also rated the target group higher than the F&B respondents ($p=0.045$), HR respondents ($p=0.013$), and the housekeeping respondents ($p=0.030$) in their current ability to demonstrate professional appearance and poise – a component of personal qualities. Table 10 shows the findings.

The Food and Beverage department respondents rated the target group higher than the HR respondents in their current decision making skills ($p=0.048$) and in their actual working knowledge of food sanitation and safety ($p=0.026$) – a component of technical skills. When the competency and skill were directly related to the main task of the department, higher ratings were obtained. The results imply that the new entrants possessed these competencies and skills, and they may have been hired for this reason.

The Front Office department respondents rated the target group higher than the HR respondents in their current ability to contribute to group problem solving – a component of problem solving skills ($p=0.033$) and in their actual knowledge of the hotel business, its objectives and its products and services – component of technical skills ($p=0.010$).

Table 10. ANOVA result on significant differences when respondents were grouped according to their departments

Competencies & Skills "IS NOW"	Department	Department	Sig. p-value
Interpersonal Skills: Understands diverse views & show sensitivity to individual differences	Front office 3.59 Proficient	Housekeeping 3.11 Nearing Proficiency	0.027*
Technical Skills: Demonstrates basic working knowledge of guest reservations	Front Office 3.50 Nearing proficiency	Housekeeping 2.94 Nearing proficiency	0.025*
		Food & Beverage 3.65 Nearing Proficiency	0.045*

Personal Qualities: Demonstrates professional appearance & poise	Front Office 4.06 Proficient	HR Department 3.56 Nearing Proficiency Housekeeping 3.53 Nearing Proficiency	.013* 0.030*
Problem Solving Skills: Ability to contribute to group problem solving	HR Department 2.89 Nearing Proficiency	Front Office 3.37 Proficient	0.033
Decision making skills	HR Department 2.86 Nearing Proficiency	Food & Beverage 3.25 Nearing Proficiency	0.048
Technical Skills: Demonstrates basic working knowledge of the hotel business, its objectives, its products & Services	HR Department 3.18 Nearing Proficiency	Front Office 3.69 Proficient	0.010
Technical Skills: Working knowledge of food sanitation & safety	HR Department 3.00 Nearing Proficiency	Food & Beverage 3.53 Proficient	0.026

Through a face-to-face interview with the human resource managers, the preliminary model was validated, as shown in Table 11. Based on the human resource managers' responses, it is therefore safe to say that the model has earned the seal of approval of industry experts.

Table 11 *Validation results*

Items	Mean	Interpretation
1) To what extent does the model describe the most important aspect of work of new entrants to the hotel industry?	4.57	To a great extent
2) To what extent are the categories clear and complete?	4.71	To a great extent
3) Does the model sufficiently capture the behavior of an ideal new entrant to the hotel industry?	4.57	To a great extent
4) To what extent can the model be adopted for recruitment and selection?	4.57	To a great extent
5) To what extent is the model sound?	4.71	To a great extent
6) To what extent is the model flexible?	4.86	To a great extent

The Final Competency Model

The study was undertaken to develop a benchmark of competencies and skills to serve as basis for a competency model for new entrants to the hotel industry. Based on the face-to-face interviews with the human resource managers of the respondent hotels, modifications were made on the interim competency model. Changes made on the model were modest although important, and they involved the rearrangement of the competencies and skills according to their level of importance (see Appendix A).

The validating group was in agreement that the personal qualities of a new entrant are the first most important consideration that employers would look for in an incoming hotel employee. The target group has very little or no experience yet, thus, their personal qualities are of vital importance. Personal qualities include being service-oriented which refers to the ability to operate with the customer's best interest in mind. Since the nature of the hotel business is customer service, it goes without saying that one must have an accommodating attitude. The hotel employer also expects the new entrant to demonstrate professional appearance and poise. Christou's (2002) and Tas (1988) rated this attribute as the third most essential competency of management trainees. New entrants must not only be mentally suitable but must also be physically fit for the job. Some of the hotel respondents emphasized that the new entrant must possess the physical attributes needed for particular jobs such as being Chinese-looking if one were to be assigned to a Chinese restaurant. Height was a requirement for some positions such as that of a guest service officer and big body size for those whose job requires them to carry heavy luggage. The findings correspond to the job requirement cited in a deluxe hotel advertisement (March 17, 2005) for the front office, food and beverage service, and the management trainees that put premium on personal qualities such as being courteous and well-groomed, and having a pleasant disposition. The hotel practitioners also expect new entrants to demonstrate willingness to learn new things, since after hiring, training commences for new entrants to adapt to the personality or culture the hotel wishes to project as its image. The findings of the study also confirm the results of the investigation done by Weber and colleagues (2009) that identified integrity, honesty,

courtesy and respect among the top soft skills needed in the entry-level hospitality management positions.

The second most important competency is comprised of the communication skills of the new entrant. Front office agents are expected to possess this being the front liners. The same is true for jobs that require guest interaction. Some respondents emphasized that 90% of their guests are English speaking. The ability to communicate effectively in oral and written forms is a must for new entrants. The findings match the job advertisement (March 17, 2005) that invites applicants for employment as front desk agents, food servers/waiters/cashiers and management trainees who are articulate or proficient in oral and written communication. Other hotels and resort businesses require incoming hotel employees to possess not only an adequate command of oral and written English but also expect proficiency in other languages such as Mandarin, Korean, German, and Japanese (job ad, March 10, 2005). TESDA (2003) confirmed that there is a need for tourism workers to be equipped with communication competencies regardless of position, rank, and salary to include conversational Japanese, Chinese, French, and other languages aside from English. The findings of the study further confirm the report of Ryzetler, et al.(2014) that both the professionals and the faculty respondents perceived oral communication skills to be the most important skills.

The third most important competency has to do with the interpersonal skills of the new entrant. This includes the ability to adjust and relate well to people of varied backgrounds. The hotel caters to varied clientele of different nationalities; thus, the competency that understands diverse views and shows sensitivity to individual differences is a must. This is especially true for positions that require guest contact and are critical in providing good guest service such as the telephone operator, the concierge, and the reservationists. This is a unique feature of hospitality positions; thus, strategies for coping with demanding customer interactions are usually encountered while working on the job. DeMarco (2000) stated that future competency requirements for entry-level positions or the frontline employees include people skills to be able to work with diverse customers and guests. Interpersonal skills and team skills were also reported as paramount skills in the document *21st Century Skills for 21st Century Jobs* as cited by Paulson (2001). Correspondingly, some respondents

noted that the ability to get along with co-workers as well is vital for harmonious co-existence in the workplace.

The fourth most important competency pertains to the planning and organizing skills of new entrants. Critical tasks such as checking in and out of guests, arranging hotel bookings for front office staff, planning ahead and scheduling which room to clean first if a room have to be done immediately and planning and organizing day-to-day activities are a must for housekeeping staff. Thus, the ability to set priorities and allocate time efficiently to accomplish tasks is a must for new entrants. Time pressure is a common experience in the hotel industry. The tasks to be accomplished in the housekeeping department, for example, are so numerous that 12 hours of work per day is not enough to get the job done. Ensuring that guestrooms are cleaned well on time, that soiled linen and napery are processed prior to distribution deadlines, and that public areas and offices are cleaned before and after rush hour, are some of the tasks of the department (Casado, 2000). In addition, a room attendant should be able to allocate time efficiently, set priorities, and figure out which room to clean first to be able to finish cleaning 12-15 rooms in 8 hours. Time management, therefore, is an essential competency.

The fifth important competency consists of the leadership and influence skills of new entrants. New entrants face clients, and this is where their ability to convince and persuade is needed; thus, influence skills are important but to a limited extent. The majority of those queried believed that new entrants should have exemplary skills in the ability to lead as good examples to others. The possession of leadership qualities to achieve organizational goals was also ranked as an essential competency for management trainees (Christou, 2000). Leadership skills are needed to facilitate work, to influence co-workers, and negotiate on professional matters (Tas, LaBrecque & Clayton, 1996). Respondents agreed that they are on the lookout for leadership potential in new entrants but thought that this competency is developed on the job. The findings are congruent with SCANS report on the kind of competencies and skills that entry-level workers must have particularly the ability to persuade and convince others (SCANS 1991, 2000). The findings also confirm Rothwell's (1996) outline of the essential competencies for future workers particularly knowing how to lead others positively to achieve desired results. Furthermore,

in Lefever and Withiam's (1998) study, hotelier participants answered that one way for hospitality-education programs to prepare graduates for the industry was to offer leadership courses. The study aimed to gain industry view of the effectiveness of the hospitality education curricula. The relative weight for leadership competency was highest and consistent with the investigations of Jeou-Shyan and colleagues (2011).

The sixth and seventh important competencies are decision-making and problem-solving skills of the new entrants. To a limited extent, new entrants make decisions on the spot particularly when attending to guests' complaints and inquiries and when deciphering whether to give in to guests' requests for discounts. Thus, the ability to think, decide, and reason out objectively is essential in hotel jobs especially for guest contact employees like the front office clerk and receptionist, beyond which new entrants have to consult their supervisors. Respondents think that this competency is developed on the job and is more for supervisory and managerial positions. However, hospitality organizations deal with a changing market and a more demanding clientele which, in turn, also requires a flexible workforce, the kind that could make decisions on the spot. Hence, decision making skills are still important though not a necessity.

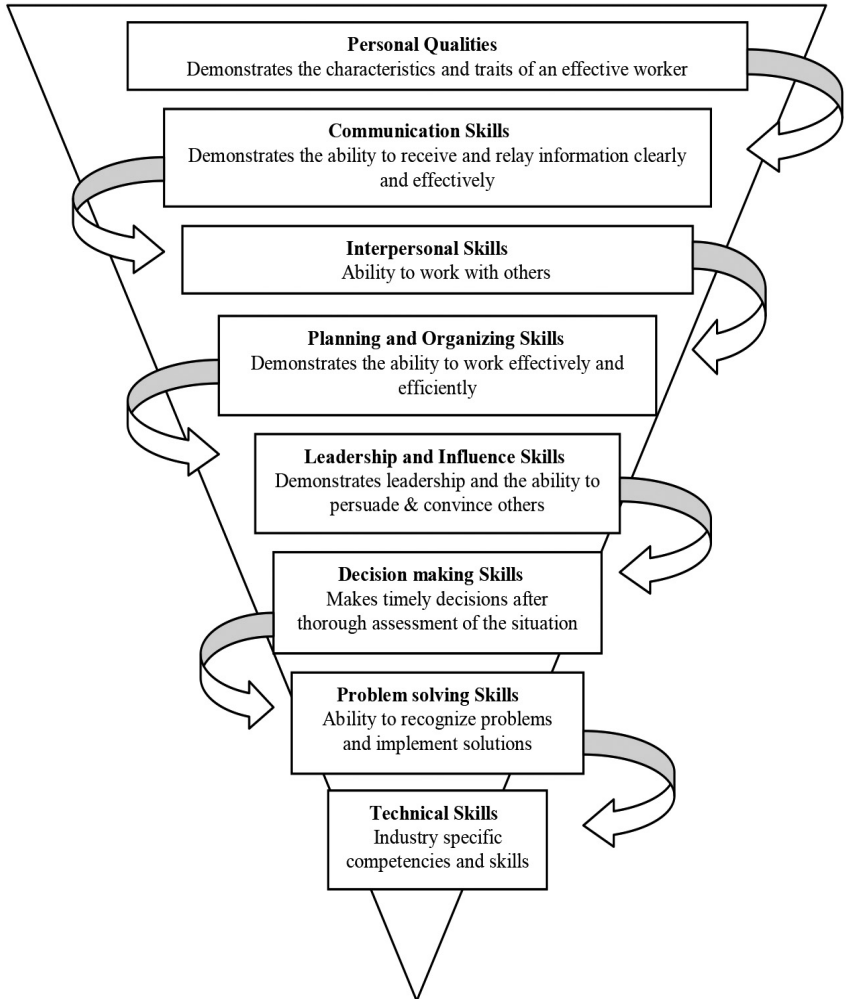
The eighth and the least important are the technical skills of the new entrants. Technical skills refer to industry specific competencies and skills. Some tasks in the hotel could be learned while on the job, which is especially true for the food and beverage service staff, front office clerk, room attendant, receptionist, concierge, and guest relations officer – the top six positions assigned to new entrants where new entrants get hired even without experience. New entrants also go through the six-month probationary period during which they are trained for particular positions in the hotel. The hotel merely requires a basic knowledge of the tasks assigned to new entrants. For positions in the food and beverage production (chefs), an apprenticeship or OJT is the minimum requirement. For the housekeeping department, technical skills also play a higher role. A job experience of 6 months to one year is required. For regular positions in the hotel, experience is also a must since they supervise the new and casual employees. Technical competencies were identified as second in importance to leadership skills, closely followed by interpersonal skills in the study

of Kay and Russette (2000). This shows the significance of technical knowledge and possibly hands-on training, including hospitality-student internships. Technical skills were valued over interpersonal skills for both entry and middle-level food and beverage positions. The findings disconfirmed the results of a previous study where technical skills ranked last in importance. The findings, however, are in conformity with the findings of Tas, La Brecque, and Clayton (1996) suggesting that technical skills were lowest in importance. Proficiency in technical skills includes computer literacy. Thus, all workers need to be computer savvy, since a high performance, high productivity, and high wage economy is entwined with advances in information technology (Paulson, 2001). Computer literacy is a requirement in the hotel industry as communicated in the job advertisement (March 17, 2005) of a deluxe hotel. The top seven competencies and skills can be determined during the job interview and are reflected in the resume of the potential hotel employee. Proficiency in technical skills is assessed by actual testing of the skills.

In the model shown below, arrows were added to illustrate the flow and emphasize the decreasing importance of the competencies as one moves down to the bottom of the inverted pyramid. The model has earned the stamp of approval of the validating group. The eight clusters of competencies and skills are defined to provide enough details about the competency so that someone using the model can recognize the competency in action, probe into it, and recommend development actions as well as observe opportunities for competence.

THE FINAL COMPETENCY MODEL

Entry level hotel practitioner’s competencies and skills arranged according to importance as identified by hotel managers and job holders



Competencies and Skills Definitions for New Entrants to the Philippine Hotel Industry

Personal Qualities:

- Trustworthy
- Punctual and meets regular office reporting;
- Observes and extends courtesies to all;
- Demonstrates willingness to learn new things and seeks continuous learning;
- Honesty/Integrity;
- Responsible, demonstrates the ability to take responsibility;
- Service-oriented and demonstrates the ability to operate with the customer's best interest in mind;
- Flexible, adapts to changing situations and can fill in diverse jobs or multi-skilled;
- Demonstrates professional appearance and poise;
- Demonstrates self confidence and a self starter.

Communication Skills:

- Ability to receive, attend to, understand and respond to verbal and nonverbal messages and act accordingly;
- Ability to understand and interpret written information and documents such as manuals and schedules to perform tasks
- Ability to convey verbal information to others and respond to a conversation effectively;
- Ability to write formal business letters and reports and express ideas clearly on paper.

Interpersonal Skills:

- Ability to build friendship;
 - A team player and contributes to group effort;
 - Ability to adjust and relate well to people of varied backgrounds;
 - Understands diverse views and shows sensitivity to individual differences;
 - Ability to handle disagreements with peers
- Planning and Organizing Skills:
- Ability to allocate time efficiently;
 - Ability to meet deadlines and schedules;

Demonstrates the ability to set priorities;
 Ability to outline a process/procedure to accomplish a goal/
 plan/task to be done

Leadership and Influence Skills:

Ability to lead as a good example to others
 Ability to coordinate work with others;
 Ability to convince and persuade others;
 Ability to give directions and guidance to others;
 Ability to initiate change to enhance productivity.

Decision-Making Skills:

Ability to make quality decisions;
 Ability to make decisions on the basis of thorough analysis
 of the situation;
 Ability to generate alternative ways in meeting objectives;
 Ability to make decisions in a short period of time

Problem-Solving Skills:

Ability to generate and analyze possible alternatives
 to a problem;
 Ability to analyze the source of a problem or situation;
 Ability to identify problems;
 Ability to contribute to group problem solving

Technical Skills:

Demonstrates basic knowledge of the hotel business,
 its objectives, its products, and services;
 Demonstrates basic work knowledge of guest relations;
 Demonstrates computer literacy (Microsoft word, Excel,
 PowerPoint, Email, Fidelio, Micros etc.);
 Demonstrates basic work knowledge of guest reservations;
 Demonstrates work knowledge of sanitation and safety;
 Demonstrates basic work knowledge of dining room service
 and operations;
 Demonstrates basic work knowledge of bar and beverage
 operations;
 Demonstrates basic work knowledge of housekeeping
 operations;

- Demonstrates basic work knowledge of hot kitchen production and operations;
- Demonstrates basic work knowledge of cold kitchen production and operations;
- Demonstrates basic work knowledge of pastry production and operations

Conclusion

The findings of the study show that there is a significant difference between the current and the desired state of competency of entry-level hotel practitioners.

The findings present a significant difference between the current and the desired competencies and skills of new entrants when respondents were grouped according to their age, gender, educational attainment, and hotel location.

The findings also show that there is a significant difference between the current and the desired level of competency of new entrants to the hotel industry when respondents were grouped according to their department.

The findings give insights into what the industry expects. Thus, they would benefit student trainees and incoming hotel employees with respect to their own preparation for employment and future career planning. Information on the strengths and weaknesses of incoming hotel employees could encourage them to persevere in order to improve on areas they are weak at and upgrade their competencies, thereby enhancing their employability. Also provided is information for curriculum development in hospitality management course offerings, as pointed out in the competencies and skills for inclusion in a course syllabus. A focus on activities to undertake in order to meet industry needs and demands is necessary. The model provides a hierarchy of competencies needed in entry-level hotel positions and can be used as a decision making tool for recruitment, selection, hiring, and placement since it could serve as a guide when conducting interviews in hiring to ensure person-organization fit. National agencies concerned with workforce planning such as the Department of Labor, the Department of Tourism, the Commission on Higher Education, and training institutions could use the model

for policy formulation to prepare potential hotel workers for future jobs. This could also prepare society for more productivity in the challenging years ahead.

One of the limitations of the study, though, is the small sample size of respondents for some departments. Only four key departments of the respondent hotels were included in the study. However, the study has shown the applicability of the framework in assessing actual and expected competencies of new entrants as well as in providing a meaningful comparison. This is an innovative approach to human resource management and the competency-based framework in the Philippine hotel sector. Furthermore, the study has made a theoretical and methodological contribution to knowledge since it utilized a competency framework to assess the competency gap and to develop a model of entry-level hotel competencies. Future researchers may do a similar study for managerial positions in other segments of the hospitality industry such as restaurants, resorts, and clubs.

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