EXPLORATIONS IN PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCY OF TRAVEL INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS IN TAIWAN

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Abstract - This study examined the current operational challenges that the travel industry faces as its environment continues to change, and explores the capabilities that travel industry professionals should possess. With the used of focus group interviews, this study discussesed the professional competency of travel industry professionals, and successfully demonstrates the knowledge (K), skills (S), and attitude (A) required by travel industry professionals, while also analyzed the duties and tasks that travel industry professionals must possess, including: Market Operation Analysis, Business Development, Product Development, Risk and Conflict Management, Marketing Strategy Implementation and the 6 dimensions, 24 knowledge, 24 skills and 5 attitudes of Customer Relationship Management.

Keywords - Professional Competency, Travel Industry, Professionals, iCAP, OCS (Occuspational Competency Standard), competency standard

I. INTRODUCTION

In the process of tourism development, the travel industry plays an important role in Taiwan. As of January 2018, the number of travel operators has reached 3,876 in Taiwan (Tourism Bureau, Ministry of Transport and Communications, R.O.C., 2018), and competition is fierce. As business continues to evolve and diversify, travel operators big or small are faced with the challenges on their management, knowledge, and communication[2]. Particularly in the travel industry, regardless of class A, class B, or consolidated travel agencies, there must be at least one travel agent to apply for the establishment of a travel agency [8].

Whether it is overseas tours (outbound), incoming visitors (inbound), and domestic tourism services, travel industry professionals must comply with government policies on politics, economy and tourism (Tourism Bureau, Ministry of Transport and Communications, R.O.C., 2018, 2016), as well as competition from competitors, Internet, and other marketing channels. As competition grows, profits margins becomes smaller and making the correct decisions, solving various problems, and withstanding the risk arising from these decisions have become an important factor for future development [2][6].

Talents play an important role in the development of any industry. As indicated in the "Industry Innovation Act," National Competent Authorities for Business Objectives may, in accordance with the needs of industry-wide development, establish a professional competency standard, certify the level of such standard, and promote international acceptance and recognition[3]. Chang (2013) pointed out that the establishment of thisOCS (occupational competency standards) must follow a standard of education and training that motivates enterprises to become learning organizations [4]. This as a result would elevate the competitiveness of the organization and the professional knowledge of the individuals.

In order to enhance the ability of tourism industry professionals to further cultivate their talent, the purpose of this study is as follows:

1. Discuss the required professional competency of travel industry professionals.
2. Discuss the key behaviors of travel industry professionals.
3. Discuss the knowledge (K), skills (S), and attitudes (A) required to become a successful travel industry professional.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study collects and analyzes relevant literature and discusses two parts. The first is the eligibility of tourism industry professionals, as well as relevant laws and regulations. The second is the analysis of professional competency of past travel industry professionals.

A. Qualifications and Related Regulations of Travel Professionals in Taiwan

Tourism Bureau, Ministry of Transportation and Communications announced the Travel Industry Regulations stipulated in of the Taiwan Development and Tourism Regulations, travel industry professionals must fulfill one of the following qualifications, and complete a certification process to be certified by the Taiwan Tourism Bureau of the Ministry of Transportation and Communications[8]. According to the tourism industry management rules, a photocopy of the manager's roster and manager's certificate of completion must be presented to the Tourism Bureau of the Ministry of Transportation and Communications. According to the Travel Industry Management Rules, for a travel manager to establish a branch office, the branch manager roster and manager's certificate of

completion must be presented to the Tourism Bureau of the Ministry of Transportation and Communications. The travel industry professional must be a full-time personnel and must not concurrently be in charge of another travel operator[8] [9].

B. Professional Competency

Spencer & Spencer (1993) believes that "function" is a person's underlying characteristic. In general management scenarios, several competency that are required for the management in the order of importance are influences, achievement tendencies, team spirit, analytical thinking, and pro-activeness[7]; And important competency that are required by the sales staff are influences, achievement tendencies, pro-activeness, interpersonal EQ, customer service propensity, relationship building, among others [11]. Career One Stop (2012) defines “function” as the specific ability to apply the knowledge, skills, and capabilities in order to complete the task [1]. The purpose is to directly connect the specific job requirement to the effective completion of the job goals. Professional competency refers to the different capabilities required for different jobs, and it can be further divided into competency, role, and job competency[5][10].

Based on the above literature review, an important foundation has been established for the continued development of this research, as we further examine the travel industry professional and their competency

III. RESERCH METHOD

This study uses focus group interviews. For the integrity and credibility of the research, a total of 12 travel industry professional, as well as experts and scholars of the field were invited to the focus group discussions. The list of experts is shown in Table 1.

Expert Discussion Outline

- What is the job position of the travel industry professional? What are the main responsibilities, job description and goals?
- What, in your opinion, are the required management skills, professional expertise, and approach for a travel industry professional? Which one do you think is the most indispensable? Why?
- Facingdrastic changes, what are the leadership abilities needed for travel industry professionals to lead their subordinates?

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Required Professional Competency of Travel Industry Professionals

Based on the competency standard published for “Tourism Operation Managers” and “Tourism Industry Business Development Managers” by the Workforce Development Agency in the iCAP(integrated competency and application platform) function development and application platform, this study begins by discussing the job description and main tasks of travel industry professional[11]. The results are as follows:

1. Job Description

Through the completion of training courses and a certification process, travel industry professionals must make adjustments to the product and services, improve the quality of services, and continually strive to achieve the goal of sustained operation through business negotiations and management [2].

2. Main Tasks

(1) Work with travel industry’s target management as it react to the dynamic market, develop tourism products and expand business through coordinated developments and marketing analysis.

(2) Identify problems and trends in travel industry's operation and service process, compile data to formulate marketing strategies and establish risk management protocols.

(3) Make immediate adjustments based on current inefficiencies of the travel industry, improve the management of high-quality services, and offer suggestion and recommendation on product and service strategies.

In summary, it is recommended that a travel industry professional should be equipped with the following six abilities: Market Operations Analysis, Business Development, Product Development, Conflict and Risk Management, Marketing Strategy Implementation, and Customer Relationship Management.

B. Expanded Analysis of Professional Competency

The experts in the focus groups interview were six travel industry managers and six experts and scholars. Their backgrounds, year of certification, years in travel industry, association position and teaching experience were as follows;

Group Category	Background	Years of Certification	Years in Travel Industry
Travel Agent Professional			
1	General manager of travel agency A	16	18
2	Deputy general manager of travel Agency B	15	17
3	General manager of travel agency C	14	15
4	General manager of travel agency D	14	18

5	Manager of travel agency E	12	16
6	General manager of travel agency F	11	15
Experts and Scholars		Association Position	Teaching Experience (Years)
7	Mr. Peng, Travel Councilor Association, R.O.C.(G)	President	
8	Travel Councilor Association, R.O.C. (H)	Director of Education	
9	Prof. Liu, Department of Tourism of University I		15
10	Prof. Wang, Department of Tourism and Leisure, University of Science and Technology (J)		8
11	Prof. Gan, Department of Tourism Management, University K		19
12	Prof. Kuo, Department of Tourism, University of Science and Technology L		7

Table I. List of Experts in Focus Group Interview

According to the professional competency of travel industry professionals discussed in the focus group interviews, from Table II to Table VIshow market operation analysis, business development, product development, conflict and risk management, marketing strategy implementation, and customer relationship management. Below is an expanded analysis of their definitions, key behaviors, and the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to successfully demonstrate these competencies.

1) Market Operation Analysis

Professional Competency	Market Operation Analysis		
Definition	Analyze the operating environment, collect tourism and tourism policies, laws and regulations, and consume domestic and foreign markets. Analyze, summarize, compare, and judge the relevance of market demand and operational planning analysis for different information, and provide operational recommendations.		
Key Behavior	1. Accurate information on domestic and foreign sightseeing tourism policies and laws can be collected. 2. SWOT analysis of sightseeing tourism market can be conducted. 3. Can analyze and summarize the operational needs of the tourism market. 4. Ability to compare market demand with operational planning. 5. Can judge the conditions for preparation and establishment of travel agencies.		
KSA Requirement	Knowledge 1. Policies and Acts 2. Assess the market SWOT 3. Set up a travel industry 4. Tax and financial management	Skill 1. Tips for collecting market information 2. Data assessment and analysis skills 3. Key elements focusing techniques 4. Skills for resource integration	Attitude 1. Rigorous assessment 2. cautious and careful 3. Positive and enthusiastic

Table II Competency Analysis of Travel Industry Professionals - Market Operations Analysis

2) Business Development

Professional Competency	Business Development
Definition	Analyze the development of the market, collect trends in the industry, evaluate competition and cooperation among suppliers, peers and other industries, develop sources of customers, evaluate feasible plans, and achieve operational goals.
Key Behavior	1. Ability to collect supplier business cooperation information. 2. Ability to plan development of customer sources. 3. Ability to analyze business development and required human, material and financial resources 4. Analyze the resources of peers, different industries and public relations. 5. Evaluate the plan to achieve business goals.

Professional Competency	Business Development		
KSA Requirement	Knowledge 1. Resources for customer cooperation 2. Customer source attributes 3. Coordination of bargaining 4. Management of goals	Skill 1. Tips for collecting business information 2. Resource assessment skills 3. Customer development skills 4. Negotiation and bargaining skills	Attitude 1. Rigorous assessment 2. cautious and careful 3. Positive and enthusiastic

Table III Competency Analysis of Industry Professionals - Business Development

3) Product Development

Professional Competency	Product Development		
Definition	Analyze the product content of travel industry, collect the source combination of products, develop different types of passenger sources, evaluate the competition and cooperation of the industry and other industries, coordinate the favorable resources of the organization, evaluate the portfolio of viable products, and achieve the operational goals.		
Key Behavior	1. Ability to collect supplier's product cooperation information. 2. The development of tourism product sources can be planned. 3. Ability to analyze product development and needs of human, material and financial resources. 4. Ability to compare product requirements with development. 5. Can evaluate the plan to reach the product mix target.		
KSA Requirement	1. Products of suppliers 2. Product source attributes 3. Structure of product costs 4. Pathways for product packaging	1. Tips for collecting product information 2. Product demand analysis skills 3. Product Development Tips 4. Product bargaining skills	1. Rigorous assessment 2. cautious and careful 3. Positive and enthusiastic

Table IV Competency Analysis of Travel Industry Professionals - Product Development

4) Conflict and Risk Management

Professional Competency	Conflict and Risk Management		
Definition	Analyze the service process of the business and products, collect relevant laws and regulations on tourism and tourism, protect the rights and interests of consumers, analyze the contents and coordination channels of tourism disputes, effectively reduce risks, achieve good conflict management, and handle the emergency response.		
Key Behavior	1. Can be familiar with related tourism laws and regulations 2. Ability to conduct risk management analysis. 3. Can evaluate the process of handling travel disputes. 4. Can handle the emergency response.		
KSA Requirement	Knowledge 1. Tourism related laws 2. Content of risk assessment 3. Contents of travel disputes 4. Emergency project	Skill 1. Collecting ordinance information skills 2. Risk assessment analysis skills 3. Tourism dispute coordination skills 4. Emergency response skills	Attitude 1. Rigorous assessment 2. cautious and careful 3. Positive and enthusiastic

Table V Competency Analysis of Travel Industry Professionals - Conflict and Risk Management

5) Marketing Strategy Implementation

Professional Competency	Marketing Strategy Implementation		
Definition	Plan marketing product marketing strategies and pathways, collaborate with e-commerce network technologies, create innovative and creative features, plan and design training courses, use marketing campaigns, and execute team operations goals.		
Key Behavior	1. Can collect market travel marketing strategy information. 2. Ability to analyze the feasibility of access markets. 3. Can use e-commerce technology to develop innovative and creative features. 4. Can plan the content of marketing training courses. 5. Ability to execute marketing activities and achieve operational goals.		
KSA Requirement	Knowledge 1. Management of marketing strategy 2. Analysis of pathway assessment 3. Demand for education and training 4. Innovative service management	Skill 1 Marketing Strategy Management Skills 2. Pathway management skills 3. Marketing Management Skills 4. E-commerce application skills	Attitude 1.Rigorous assessment 2. Positive and enthusiastic 3. Teamwork

Table VI Competency Analysis of Travel Industry Professionals - Marketing Strategy Implementation

6) Customer Relationship Management

Professional Competency	Customer Relationship Management		
Definition	With the characteristics of travel industry managers, coordinate customer relationships, EQ emotional management, provide customers with quality services, build brand image and loyalty.		
Key Behavior	1. Can establish customer relationship management concept. 2. Ability to analyze the process of communicating and coordinating customer service. 3. Ability to educate emotional EQ management. 4. Ability to analyze solutions to improve service quality. 5. The ability to plan the brand's operational goals.		
KSA Requirement	Knowledge 1. Leadership and management 2. Customer Relationship Management 3. Emotional EQ Management 4. Brand image management	Skill 1. Leadership and management skills 2. Customer relationship management application skills 3. Emotional management skills 4. Communication and coordination skills	Attitude 1. Integrity and honesty 2. Positive and enthusiastic 3. Teamwork

Table VII Competency Analysis of Travel Industry Professionals - Customer Relationship Management

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

1) This study proposes the important professional competency of travel industry professionals, which could be provided to schools and travel agencies in the future for educational and training purposes.
2) As suggested by the experts in this focus group study, the use of technology in the travel industry and the continued development of innovative services are inevitable as the market environment continues to evolve. It is therefore important to pay attention on effectively utilizing Internet related technology, social media, and future innovations.
3) The scope of this study is limited to the professional competency of travel industry professionals in Taiwan. Further comparative studies of travel industry professionals in other countries is highly recommended.

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