Academic Papers

Important competency requirements for managers in the hospitality industry

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ABSTRACT

This research attempted to identify core competencies that are important to the success of future managers in the hospitality industry. A total of 296 usable questionnaires collected from hospitality managers and students in the Southeastern United States were used for analysis. Factor analysis generated six dimensions of core competencies: hospitality skills, interpersonal skills, supervisory skills, food and beverage management skills, leadership, and communication skills. Analysis on the perceived importance of the six identified competencies for the success of future hospitality managers revealed significant differences between managers and students on food and beverage management skills, interpersonal skills, and leadership. Findings provide hospitality educators and managers with useful insights when planning curriculum for enhancement of the skills and competencies of future leaders.

1. Introduction

Researchers have emphasized the importance of the ability to identify skills, knowledge factors and competencies required by hospitality managers as they attempt to ensure their firm's competitiveness and success in today's fast-changing business environment (Chung-Herrera, Enz, & Lankau, 2003; Kay and Moncarz, 2004). Earlier studies have added new competencies to the list of the recognized competencies required for a successful career in the hospitality industry while other studies have demonstrated that the priorities of the skills and competencies have changed over the years (i.e., Brownell, 2004; Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Gilbert and Guerrier, 1997; Kay and Russette, 2000; Perdue, Woods, & Ninemeier, 2001).

In today's global economic environment of increased competition and dynamic changes, it is important for hospitality students, managers and educators to understand the competencies required for success by tomorrow's industry leaders. Given a fast changing business environment, the authors decided to examine the perceptions of unit level hospitality managers and current hospitality management students to determine if there existed a significant difference in the perceptions between these two groups in regards to competencies required for hospitality managers. The purpose of this study was two-fold. First, this study identified competencies that are perceived to be important to future hospitality managers. Second, it investigated differences in perceptions between managers and students regarding the importance of the identified competencies. Competencies refer to knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, motives, traits, and characteristics that are desirable or necessary for individuals to perform a job (Dalton, 1997; Gorsline, 1996; McLagan, 1996; Perdue et al., 2001).

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By reducing 44 different skills and competencies into six summarizing factors, this research enables academics and industry managers to easily understand the educational areas that should be emphasized for career success in the hospitality industry. The perceptions of students and industry managers are detailed in this study to provide insight on the competencies that are of concern to students and industry managers. It also highlights the differences between the two groups regarding the relative importance of competencies for hospitality managers. The findings of this research will assist hospitality educators to prepare students for careers in the hospitality industry. It will also be useful to industry managers who are responsible for recruiting and training managerial candidates from the collegiate ranks. Additionally, this study will enhance understanding of the important competencies that should be considered by hospitality managers if they expect to be effective in today's dynamic industry environment.

2. Literature review

2.1. Hospitality management competencies

After an extensive review of the literature, the authors found that there seems to be a consensus on the importance of human resource skills as a critical competency for hospitality managers. Brownell (2004) surveyed the general managers of various luxury and upscale hotels in North America to determine the skills and personal characteristics that were most critical to their success and career development. The survey results indicated that respondents gave high importance ratings to leading teams, effective listening, coaching employees, providing feedback, and managing conflicts. With respect to personal characteristics: hard work, trustworthiness, and integrity received high importance ratings. The importance of the aforementioned human resources skills were also noted in other studies. For example, in a survey conducted by Breiter and Clements (1996), industry experts listed leadership, managerial communication, employee relations, training, and organizing as the most essential skills. Kay and Russette (2000) produced similar findings. Based on the interviews and surveys of the members of Palm Beach County Hotel and Motel Association, they reported that human resources skills such as employee-centered leadership and interpersonal skills were the most essential competencies across all functional areas and management levels examined in their study. The authors also generated two skills that were considered important for all managers but had not been mentioned in previous literature on hospitality competencies. They were "working knowledge of product-service" and "adapting creatively to change".

Another study by Gursoy and Swanger (2005) examined important course content items in hospitality management curriculum based on the survey data collected from 328 professionals in the hospitality industry. The authors found that oral communication skills were the most important followed by leadership skills. Other important skills included understanding profit and loss statements, good work habits, customer service skills, development of personal and professional ethics, written communication skills, team building skills, conflict/dispute resolution skills, and setting goals/objectives. Tesone and Ricci (2005) identified desirable knowledge, skills and attitudinal qualities for a successful career in the hospitality and tourism industries using the survey data collected from the members of Central Florida Hospitality and Lodging Association. The survey results indicated that the skills and abilities associated with teamwork, communication, and guest services were highly rated. Similarly, in management competency studies outside the hospitality discipline, communication was cited as an important skill for future leaders (e.g. Guarriello, 1996; Thrasher, 2009; Trinka, 2005).

A recent study by Kay and Moncarz (2004) challenged the traditional belief about human resources as the most important skills for hospitality management success. They conducted a comparison study between knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) considered necessary for success and the actual KSAs which contributed to success in lodging management. They analyzed 184 completed surveys collected from managers and professionals in the hospitality industry. Although both upper-level executives and middle-level managers reported human resources management as the most important competency, no statistically significant relationship was observed between human resources and monetary compensation. Instead, they found a positive and significant relationship between financial management knowledge and compensation.

Kay and Moncarz (2004) opined that a portion of the reason for the significant relationship between financial management competencies and compensation could be due to the fact that executive compensation is usually higher than entry-level or mid-level management regardless of financial management competency. Another explanation proposed by the authors was that managers with strong competencies in financial management could be better prepared for upper level management or executive positions and are more likely to be promoted. These assertions were based upon the finding that the upper level managers who participated in Kay and Moncarz's (2004) study possessed higher levels of financial management understanding and earned twice the compensation of their lower level management counterparts. The authors suggested that although human resource skills are required for all managers, middle managers should direct more attention to analytical skills and financial management knowledge. Competence in human resource management alone might not be sufficient to advance to senior management positions.

2.2. Competencies by management level

Tas (1988) generated a list of important competencies necessary for hotel general-manager trainees based upon the survey data collected from the general managers of 75 top U.S. hotels. Of 36 competencies identified in the study, six