



Cultural competence for tour leaders: Scale development and validation

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ABSTRACT

Tour leaders' cultural competence (CC) significantly influences their job performance and deserves more attention in the tourism research. However, no scales are currently available for evaluating CC. The goal of this study developed a scale has high validity and reliability for measuring tour leaders' CC. In-depth interviews with 20 tour leaders and content analysis to establish the initial items. An exploratory factor analysis was performed on 321 short-haul inclusive tour leaders to identify the 10 CC factors of tour leaders. Then, 284 long-haul inclusive tour leaders are collected for testing confirmatory factor analysis to identify the validity of the 36-item tour leaders' cultural competence (TLCC) scale. The contributions of this study are the expansion of current understanding of CC and tour group dynamics. The scale serves as a useful tool for tour leaders to measure their CC and provide management implications and suggestions for travel agencies in arranging tour leaders.

1. Introduction

Previous studies asserted that individuals need to develop CC to interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds (Gregersen, Morrison, & Black, 1998). Selmeski (2007) indicated that CC is an individual's ability to apply his/her cultural knowledge to interact effectively with people from a different cultural background. Scherle and Nonnenmann (2008) indicated that CC is a continuous process in which an individual learns from, observes, and reflects on specific events and behaves according to different cultural situations. Therefore, people who possess CC are more likely to accept and learn other cultures and are more willing to abide by the customs of other societies. They are not only able to effectively interact with people of different cultural backgrounds (Wilson, Ward, & Fischer, 2013), but also more aware of the cultural differences and use their cultural knowledge to adjust their own behaviors (Triandis, 2006). Some studies validated that repetitive engagements with diverse groups help individuals learn about and reflect on local cultures, consequently improving their job performance (Suarez-Balcazar, Balcazar, Taylor-Ritzler, Portillo, Rodakowski, Garcia-Ramirez, & Willis, 2011).

Group package tours (GPTs) are products that provide pre-arranged transportation, accommodation, destinations, and services (Wang, Hsieh, Chou, & Lin, 2007; Wang, Hsieh, & Human, 2000). Group package tours (GPTs) typically include a tour leader, who is responsible for escorting the group and providing services (Wang, Hsieh, & Chen, 2002). Tour leaders are the primary mediators between the tour members and local hosts, their performance influences not only tourists'

regard for the travel agency, but also their loyalty and overall travel experience (Bowie & Chang, 2005; Mak, Wong, & Chang, 2011). Therefore, tour leaders play an integral role in GPTs.

Tour leaders assume instrumental, social, interactional, and communicative roles when escorting tour groups (Cohen, 1985). The instrumental role entails maintaining pre-arranged schedules and researching local travel information and road use habits. The social role entails interacting with tour members from different cultural backgrounds and maintaining a harmonious mood within the group. The interactional role entails mediating role concerning the tour group, destination, tour suppliers, and local communities (Scherle & Nonnenmann, 2008), tour leaders help tour members to understand and accept local cultural customs, and they can guide tour members how to display appropriate behaviors in a manner that respect local norms (Yu, Weiler, & Ham, 2002). The communicative role entails assuming the role as a tour guide responsible for introducing the local environment (Tsaur & Lin, 2014), drawing on local knowledge and communication skills to create a memorable tourism experience for the tour members. All of the aforementioned roles are associated with CC. Because of tour leaders' job characteristics and content, they must have the ability to quickly adapt to various cultural situations and handle/resolve problems that may arise while escorting their tour group and adopt diverse role functions to achieve tourists' satisfaction.

According to Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), tour leaders learn about cross-cultural knowledge and training to help them interact in new cultural environments and guide their tour members perform behaviour appropriately and immersed in the travel environments.

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Bowie and Chang (2005) have investigated that customer satisfaction are related to the role of the tour leader and the service performance during the tour. The tour leaders' CC positively affects their tour guiding performance and tour satisfaction of the tourists. This indicates the significance of Tour leaders' CC in GPTs. To act professionally and demonstrate leadership, some empirical studies have demonstrated that tour leaders need a variety of skills and competences. For example, tour leaders act as buffers among tourists, local environment, arranging transportation, interpreting, fulfilling tourists' needs and problem-solving, and making the environment safe for tourists (Zhang & Chow, 2004: 82). Min (2012) asserted that tour leaders can use emotional intelligence to manage their own performance and regulate tourists' moods. Moreover, Luoh and Tsaur (2014) indicated that dealing with changed itinerary and handling emergency situations are also tasks and duties of tour leaders. CC is one of many competencies that individuals must possess in order to be a successful tour leader.

Although Yu et al. (2002) have presented a conceptual framework for examining the intercultural competence (ICC) of Chinese tour guides and the impacts of ICC on Chinese tourists' satisfaction with their experiences, but it is not empirical research. Few studies (Sulaiman Al Jahwari, Sirakaya-Turk, & Altintas, 2016; Leclerc & Martin, 2004) have discussed the cross-cultural communication skills of tour leaders. However, communication skills only constitute one aspect of tour leaders' CC (Yu et al., 2002). Besides the role of a communicator, tour leaders also act as an environmental interpreter, information provider, and cultural messenger for the group (Tsaur & Teng, 2017). In management practice, different type of GPTs need varying tour leader's CCs. For example, cultural tours emphasize tour leaders as "mediators" of local culture, the guiding demands that require an intimate knowledge of local culture and professional interpretation skills. The tour leader may influence what tour members see and what aspects of the host culture, tour groups depend on their tour leader for language translation, mediating the group's interaction with host communities and social settings, and achieve the appropriate balance between cultural buffering and immersion (Yu et al., 2002). Therefore, the tour leaders' CC scale proposed in this study can serve as a useful tool and provide suggestions for travel agencies in arranging tour leaders.

Past studies have found that tour guiding performance positively affected tourists' satisfaction (Bowie & Chang, 2005) and authentic with their intercultural travel experiences (Yu et al., 2002). The relationship boundary of the tour leader is more extensive and complex. Tour leaders can provide tour members with deep insights into a destination, help them to understand and accept local customs (Yu et al., 2002), and have the ability to guide tour members in behaving in accordance with local cultures and the capacity to adapt to different cultural environments and the cultures of different tour members in order to effectively escort and manage their tour groups, which implies that tour leaders need display domains of cultural competence differ from another occupation. However, empirical studies exploring what cultural competence on tour leaders are lacking.

The purpose of this study was to develop a scale to measure tour leaders' CC and the items of TLCC scale that can be applied for an evaluation effectively. This study fills three major gaps in current literature. First, the proposed scale helps tour leaders assess their cultural learning and application abilities. It can also help travelers evaluate the CC of their tour leaders. Second, this study proposes a scale for helping travel agencies assign suitable tour leaders to satisfy customer demands and tour characteristics. It can also serve as reference for tour managers associations to develop cross-cultural training programs. Finally, this study proposed a scale to measure the CC of tour leaders. The scale can be applied to improve tour leaders' CC or to contribute to cultural learning.

2. Literature review

2.1. Role of tour leader

Tour leaders, also known as tour escorts or managers, do on occasion act as tour guides (Tsaur & Lin, 2014, p.29). The World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (WFTGA) (2003) states that the tour leader handles the itinerary, makes sure the tour matches the promotional literature and meets customer expectations, and adds local color. After tour members arrive at a destination, a local guide is typically dispatched to provide travel information and services (Holloway, 1981). When a local guide is unavailable, the tour leader is required to assume the role of a local guide and independently escort the entire tour group (Chang, 2006). In Taiwan, many travel agencies request that tour leaders of long-haul group tours are able to partially serve as a guide or directly assume the role of local guide. In these situations, the tour leader is responsible for receiving and escorting tour members overseas, tending to their itinerary, introducing local attractions, and providing language services (Luoh & Tsaur, 2014; Tsaur & Lin, 2014). Thus, the term "tour leader" discussed in this study refers to two roles, namely, tour leader and local guide.

In the context of tour guiding, tour leaders are tasked with providing core services, customer-based services, and communication services (Heung, 2008). They are not only the key mediator between the tour group and local hosts but also the frontline personnel that directly affects tourist' overall impression and satisfaction (e.g., Geva & Goldman, 1991; Wang et al., 2002; Wong & Wang, 2009). Subsequently, their performance influences corporate image, customer loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth (e.g., Wong & Wang, 2009; Cheng et al., 2016). Therefore, the tour leader is the key factor influencing the successful fulfillment of the itinerary, and their service performance affects tourists' perceived travel quality and their evaluation of the travel agency.

2.2. Definition of cultural competence

Culture affects and shapes people's beliefs, values, opinions, attitudes, emotions, behaviours, and lifestyles (Cheung, Shah, & Muncer, 2002). CC refers to an individual's ability to rapidly learn different cultures and convert this knowledge into action and to draw on his/her cultural knowledge to effectively interact with people of different cultural background (Selmeski, 2007). CC is associated with an individual's knowledge, comprehension, and skill pertaining to different cultural groups (Almutairi, McCarthy, & Gardner, 2015).

CC and cultural intelligence (CQ) are essentially different concepts. Previous studies asserted that intelligence is a stable ability and less amenable to development (Beauvais, Brady, O'Shea, & Griffin, 2011), while competence emphasizes that the work-related skills are changeable (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2004). Earley and Ang (2003) developed the construct of cultural intelligence based on contemporary theories of intelligence (e.g., general intelligence, emotional intelligence, and social intelligence) (Ang et al., 2007), CQ is comprised of metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural factors. Though cultural intelligence has a behavioural factor, it appears to individuals are more concerned about acquiring cultural knowledge and practicing appropriate behaviours than about applying them in cross-cultural situations (Johnson, Lenartowicz, & Apud, 2006). In addition, Cultural intelligence is only one construct of CC and different from the content of CC (Johnson et al., 2006). Therefore, CC focuses on individuals' tangible actions and abilities.

People who possess CC are able to notice cultural authenticity and distinguish the cultural differences between themselves and others (Scherle & Coles, 2008). CC has become an integral attribute in the workplace. Past studies have demonstrated that individuals need different cultural competence in specific professions and workplaces, as the result of the requirements of their roles, job tasks, and careers. Such

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